Short Stories.

No. 724.] Week ending November 15, 1902. [Price One Penny.

"The Lady Honoria was in the arms of an Egyptian."

(See our Fascinating New Series. "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA," first page).

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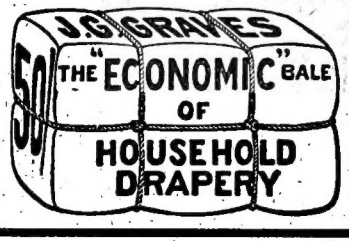

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Short Stories.

No. 724. For the Week Ending November 15th, 1902. One Penny.

FASCINATING NEW SERIES. BEGIN TO-DAY.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. The comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

Lady Peggy undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. Some dervishes are dancing when suddenly Belinda, excited beyond all self-restraint, throws herself into the midst of the fanatics and tries to imitate their weird dance. Her enthusiasm is misinterpreted. Instantly all is confusion. The guide, however, snatches Belinda from danger, and hurries them away. Belinda is profuse in her thanks, then suddenly with a cry of: "It is you, you! Lady Peggy, he's not a dragoman at all. He's David Carr," throws herself into his arms.

The Duke Begins to Score.

Conceive, if you can, my feelings!

The situation was one words cannot adequately express. Here was a young girl, who, before the Duchess of Eastacres and the Duke of Eastacres had publicly embraced a dragoman! For a dragoman to all intents and purposes he was. The fact that under his disguise would be found one David Carr, a civil engineer, didn't affect the case at all. He had appeared before us as a native guide, as a native guide he should be treated.

"Belinda!" I cried in horrified accents, "are you mad? Come away from that person immediately. He may have cholera or small-pox, or some other dreadful disease. You never can tell what these natives suffer from."

"Why Lady Peggy, how absurd!" replied Belinda. 'David's an Englishman, he——"

I sternly interrupted her.

"That man," I said, "was hired by us this evening as a dragoman. I refuse to look upon him as anything else."

"Mousma" accepted the situation in a moment. He whispered something to Belinda—the nature of the communication I regret to say, I could not distinguish—then, with an exaggerated salaam, signified his readiness to conduct us to the hotel.

"Certainly not," said the Duchess, "I refuse to go another step in that person's company." She pointed the remark with a shake of her head—her bonnet, poor dear, was a little on one side, or I'm sure she would have looked dignified as ever, despite the distressing circumstances.

"Nonsense, mother," interposed Eastacres. "The streets are impassable to-night without a guide. The man will serve as well as any other." As he spoke the Duke took some silver from his pocket, and handed it to Mousma—nothing shall make me call the man David Carr!

That person, however, affected not to see his Grace's generous gift, but started off at a good round pace in the direction of the hotel. I followed close behind, with a firm hold of Belinda.

When we arrived at "The Continental," our dragoman had disappeared; Belinda seemed disappointed, but made no remark. She went upstairs at once to her room. I was about to follow, when the Duchess, in somewhat imperative fashion, demanded an interview.

"We'd better go to your sitting-room," she said stiffly; the dear creature had not a reception-room of her own, her

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pointure or her meanness would not permit of the extravagance.

"Lady Carstairs," she commenced, seating herself in a capacious lounge chair, "I think you are behaving badly."

"Really, Duchess——"

"Please hear me out. I am not accustomed to be interrupted. You gave me to understand that this girl, Belinda North, though of no birth and worse family, was not altogether impossible. In that belief, and having regard to Eastacres' inadequate income, I agreed if not to sanction, at any rate not to oppose your wish for a marriage between him and your—your charge. In view of what occurred to-night, in view of the indelicacy of the whole proceeding, I am bound to say you have behaved badly. You have, in fact, deceived me. The girl is atrocious, her conduct unspeakable."

Now this was more than I could stand. The Duchess had sent for her son by her own wish, not at my suggestion, and beyond mentioning the fact that North was a millionaire, and Belinda his sole heiress, I had given her Grace no information whatever. Besides, I wasn't going to allow anyone to call the girl I chaperoned "atrocious." Such an assertion threw discredit upon me. Other people besides Belinda had embraced a native—a real one, as the Duchess should learn.

"Very well, Duchess," I said stiffly, "if that is your opinion I have nothing more to say. We will consider all negotiations in regard to Eastacres at an end."

I rose as I spoke, and bowed in the direction of the door. The Duchess, who had expected penitence and pleadings on my part, was considerably astonished.

"I don't say that, Lady Peggy. Perhaps Belinda may improve. Still——"

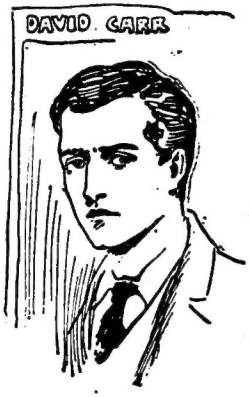
"As to that, I can't tell," I answered. "Belinda met this David Carr on board the steamer. Her father warned me that she was smitten in that direction, but did not consider it more than a passing attraction. I saw Carr two days ago, and gave him to understand I would not tolerate his further acquaintance with Belinda. I told him also that the girl had passed her word not to communicate with or see him without my knowledge. That I suppose suggested the idea of a disguise. He appeared, as you know, as a dragoman, and we engaged him, and a very fortunate engagement it turned out for some of us. Those dervishes might have torn us in piecemeal, at any rate you seemed to think so."

The Duchess groaned at the remembrance.

"What do you propose doing in regard to this young man?" she asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. "It will not need much tact to get rid of him," I answered. "Things will evolve themselves. Belinda is young, and, like all girls, fond of admiration. She will soon forget him in the society of men his superiors in every way. But you must remember, Duchess, that a girl like Belinda, of great beauty and immense wealth, will be a prize desired by every *fortune hunter* in Europe."

I emphasised "fortune-hunter" purposely. It was well known that the Duke had proposed to two American heiresses.



"Belinda will be the centre of attraction wherever we go," I continued. "I am not unwilling to further your aims in procuring her fortune for Eastacres, but I cannot consent to criticism such as you have directed against me, because events turn out less favourably than you desire. There are others with a title as old as your own who would be genuinely desirous of winning Belinda. Eastacres is the first in the field, but I do not anticipate he will be the last."

"My dear Peggy"—the Duchess is wonderfully effusive on occasion—"you quite misunderstand me. I intended no criticism of you, your methods have always commanded my admiration. I merely expressed the horror I felt at witnessing Belinda's demonstrations of affection. One is compelled to swallow much to keep up a position nowadays. But," the Duchess shook her head, "I cannot swallow a dragoman! Besides, consider the example, the terrible example to Honoria."

"I don't think Honoria stands in need of an example," I returned drily. "It's only a week ago, the very evening that we paid a visit to Ilderim's bazaar, that I found your daughter in the arms of an Egyptian."

"What!" The Duchess bounded to her feet. "My daughter! Impossible!"

"It's very sad," I answered, "and I feel for you, dear Duchess, from the bottom of my heart. But, it is as I say. Mr. North and I, as you will remember, went to look for Honoria when she 'lost her way.' We found her in the garden of the old Moorish palace close to the Citadel. She was hugging an Egyptian—a real one, Duchess, not a white man in disguise."

The Duchess almost choked with rage. She was long past controlling her emotions, and begged me to ring the bell and summon Honoria forthwith.

That unfortunate young woman speedily appeared. She was dressed in a lank, green gown, and looked more than usually unattractive. The sight of her seemed to goad the Duchess into frenzy. In our set we do not trouble to conceal our feelings, or to veil our language when amongst ourselves. It is only to outsiders we are politely insolent.

"Come here," said the Duchess, "*here*," and she dragged Honoria under the electric light. "I am told that not content with disgracing me with your looks, your manners and your total inability to make a decent marriage, you are carrying on a disgraceful intrigue with a native—a vile, brown-skinned Egyptian!"

"He's not an Egyptian, mother. He's the son of a sheik, a pure-blooded Arab——"

"Good Heavens!" shrieked the Duchess, "do you dare to argue? What a pure-blooded Arab may mean, unless it refers to a horse, I don't know or care. But understand this—see this creature again, dare to degrade your name and family by such disgraceful conduct, and I shut you up. I mean it; your brother said you should have been put in a mad-house long ago. What!" as the wretched girl tried to defend herself, "do you defy me? You——" the Duchess bent towards her daughter, and with considerable violence slapped her face.

With a low cry Honoria stepped back, an ugly red mark on her sallow cheek. I half think the Duchess was tempted to slap her again, when the door flew open and Belinda, like an avenging goddess, swooped down on her Grace.

"You wicked old woman," she said. "How dare you! I heard you slap Honoria. Don't deny it"—the Duchess had no intention of so doing—"you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Don't cry, Honor, dear"—she turned to the weeping Honoria—"she sha'n't ill-treat you while I'm here. What's it all about? El Hamed, I suppose. Never mind, you shall see him all the same. I'll look after that. Only you mustn't promise not to or I can't help you."

She mopped up Honoria's tears as she spoke, and drew the limp figure close to her side. The Duchess, utterly aghast at this unexpected attack, glanced helplessly at me. I realised that the emergency required nice handling.

"Belinda," I said severely, "you have used most improper language to the Duchess. You must apologise at once. Rudeness at all times is vulgar, and when directed against a lady of her Grace's station it becomes unpardonable."

Belinda heard me with heightened colour, but her lips tightened into a straight line, and a mutinous look settled in the big, blue eyes. I realised I must deal with her in different fashion.

"Do you think your father would approve of your conduct?" I whispered. "Is it fitting that a young girl should speak in such a way to a woman old enough to be her mother?"—for that matter the dear Duchess might easily have been Belinda's grandmother.

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At the mention of her father the girl frowned. Then in a most unlooked-for fashion she capitulated.

"I ought not to have called you 'wicked,'" she said to the Duchess. "I apologise for that, but you shouldn't have slapped Honoria." She held out a slim brown hand, and her Grace reluctantly accepted the apology.

"I'm going to take Honor to my room for a bit," Belinda continued. "You don't mind?" She smiled at the Duchess, nodded to me, and whisked Honoria out of the door before there was time for anyone to protest.

The Duchess gasped and sank into a chair.

"Mark my words, Peggy," she said, "that girl will be a handful. I doubt if even you can manage her."

I smiled but did not discuss the question. I was quite sure of my capacity for managing Belinda, or any other young woman. Millicent had been difficult but I had broken her in at last. Diplomacy is the main thing required in dealing with young people. Give way to them in small things, never actively oppose them in big ones. Steady pressure tactfully applied will do all that is required. After a while I felt confident Belinda would respond to my will as easily as a thoroughbred obeys his rider.

I thought it better to supervise the interview between Belinda and Honoria, so leaving the Duchess to recover composure and to plan fresh ignominies for her daughter, I slipped away.

I found the two girls in the corridor. Belinda was engaged in parrying the Duke's inquiries as to what had happened to his sister. She—Belinda, I mean—was looking mischievous to a degree. Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks were tinted with a wild-rose flush. With short skirts and long hair—she only consented to put it up on state occasions—she was the picture of a wilful but a lovely seventeen.

As I hastened down the corridor a voice pursued me.

"Lady Peggy, Lady Peggy! just an instant."

I turned, and to my astonishment faced Lord Reginald Davenant—"Reg," as he was familiarly called.

"I thought you'd gone to Heidelberg?" I cried.

"Beastly cold place Heidelberg!" he replied with a shiver. "Had to come here—bad chest and things, you know. Who's that, Lady Peggy?" he glanced towards Belinda. "I must be introduced."

He advanced towards her as he spoke, and with a little thrill of gratification I introduced him. Reg gazed with undisguised admiration at the girl. He was renowned for his numerous flirtations and entanglements; indeed, an intrigue with Davenant carried with it a certain distinction; it was, so to speak, a certificate of smartness. I had my suspicions as to the reason that brought him to Cairo. The presence of Mrs. Murchison Lee—Midge, as the little American was called—had, I thought, as much to do with his coming as his chest! If Belinda should prove a successful rival to the dainty little Yankee, the girl's social reputation would be made at once.

Reg's demeanour had its effect on the Duke. Hitherto that nobleman, to use a racing phrase, had looked on Belinda as a sure thing. Her beauty and her millions were, he thought, his own when it should please him to claim them. Now, for the first time, he realised that the girl might have other suitors as distinguished as himself.

From that night he exerted himself to fascinate the girl And if his fascinations lacked freshness, Belinda was too ingenuous to know it.

The next morning the Duke's change of tactics became apparent. He looked us up directly after breakfast. Reg must have divined his intention, for he appeared shortly after nine—quite two hours before his usual time for rising. When he arrived, however, the Duke had already "scored."

Belinda had accepted Eastacres' invitation to join a party to the Pyramids. The Duke had asked her without referring to me, and the young lady had appreciated the compliment.

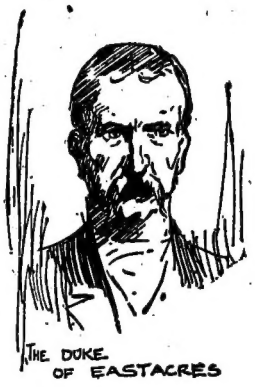
"It will be lovely!" she said, "only let us go on camels, *please*. It doesn't seem suitable to see the Pyramids in waggonettes. It's like a cheap trip to the seaside. Could we have camels, Duke?"

"My dear Belinda, what an absurd idea!" I exclaimed "No one will have courage to ride the creatures if you get them."

The Duke smiled tolerantly. "The more timorous can go in the waggonettes," said he. "Miss North and I prefer—er—camels."

To ride a camel was an immense sacrifice for him to make. Belinda for once had the grace to appreciate it.

"It's awfully good of you," she said enthusiastically. "Please may we spend a long time in the desert, or must we come back here to lunch?"



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

"I thought we might put up at the Mena Hotel; it's just at the foot of the great Pyramid, you know. If you and Lady Carstairs agree, we might stay there a few days."

"How delightful!" cried Belinda, with pink cheeks. She was only a beautiful child, after all, I reflected.

"It's really very kind of the Duke," she added; "isn't it, Lady Peggy?"

"The Duke's always charming," I said, smiling.

"*Always!*" remarked Lord Davenant from the doorway. "In what particular manner is his charm working this morning? A trip to the Pyramids—don't let him persuade you, Miss North; they're the biggest frost you can imagine. Three hours drive in a scorching sun to see a heap of stones! Much better come with me for a spin on your bike."

"I can do that as well," said Belinda politely, much to Reg's glee. His triumph, however, was short-lived.

"I am afraid you will have to forego that treat to-day, Miss North," said the Duke. "I shall want your help in choosing our steeds this morning; we ought to start this afternoon about three. I thought it would be a good thing to get to the Mena in time for *table d'hote*. What do you say, Lady Peggy?"

Belinda agreed with me it was a charming thought, and rushed off to get ready to go with the Duke, Reg pursuing her with offers of assistance.

"A charming girl," said the Duke, and pressed my hand.

I smiled, and gave a sigh of satisfaction. Matters were beginning to go as I wished. It would save me such a lot of time and trouble if Belinda married Eastacres.

My spirits were somewhat damped by the unexpected return of Belinda bearing a note.

"It's from David Carr," she remarked calmly. "I've only just received it. I suppose you'd better see what he says?"

I grasped the letter quickly, and, with much annoyance, read as follows:

"Look out for me to-day, dearest.—DAVID CARR."

"It's not very long, is it?" said Belinda regretfully.

"It's excessively impertinent," I returned.

"You see," she continued, "he doesn't say when, or where——"

"Or how you may expect him," I interrupted angrily. "Possibly he'll appear as a camel driver on this occasion."

Belinda chuckled. "Never mind, Lady Peggy, I won't tell the Duchess," and with an impudent smile she sauntered down the stairs.

I felt extremely vexed. Somehow or other these intrusions of David Carr must be stopped. I made up my mind as to that, though how it was to be done I could not think.

Crawley Drummond unexpectedly came to my assistance.

"That young man is coming here to lunch to-day, Peggy," he observed. "The dragoman, I mean—David Carr, you know. Sir Willoughby Tresham was speaking to me last night about him; says he's a very clever young fellow, bound to get on. Seemed immensely struck with him, in fact; and asked him here to lunch. Tresham's always interested in his own profession, you know; he's helped lots of young and promising engineers"——

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I nodded my thanks to Crawley for the information, and with all haste made my way to the Duke's apartments. His mother's suite of rooms might be curtailed, not so his own. He occupied one of the largest and most expensive suites in the hotel, magnificently furnished and beautifully fitted up. My mission was of too delicate a nature to intrust to my maid; I had, perforce, to go myself.

I entered the drawing-room unannounced and apparently disturbed a family conclave.

The Duchess was seated by the window, gazing with ill-concealed dislike at the wretched Honoria. That unfortunate young woman was cowering on the floor, the Duke standing over her with a look on his face I did not like. I always deprecate extreme measures, though I know by experience what mothers have to suffer from recalcitrant daughters. Still, I daresay Honoria was very trying.

"Get up!" said the Duke. "Get up, I say!"

Honoria staggered to her feet. Her face was swollen with weeping, and there was a look of terror, wild, unreasoning terror, in her eyes.

"Now go to your room and stay there. And——" He paused. "Remember you are to be civil to Mark Striven when he comes this evening. You understand?"

The girl made no answer, but with the same wild look in her eyes left the room.

"Honoria was been favouring us with her views of my conduct," explained the Duke, "and intimated her intention of communicating them to Miss North. I don't intend that lady to be worried with my sister's nonsense. Honoria understands that now. By the bye, Lady Peggy, you know my cousin, Mark Striven? I hope to arrange a match between him and my sister. He'll be here to-night. Striven's a very decent chap."

Remembering the tales I had heard of Mark Striven I could not repress a little start. I even felt a touch of compassion for Honoria. However, it was none of my business, and certainly Honoria was aggravating. I decided to nip Belinda's friendship for her in the bud.

"I came to ask you, Duke, if you would arrange to have lunch to-day at the Gheyhizah Palace, or one of the other hotels? I want Belinda to see as much of Cairo as she can. That would bring you back here about half-past three or four—just in time to start for the Pyramids."

"I shall be only too delighted," he replied; "don't expect us, Lady Peggy, earlier than four."

I waited expectantly for luncheon. The Continental being the last place Belinda would expect to meet young Carr, she would be in no hurry to return. I pictured her glancing anxiously among the crowd in the bazaars, and down the Mooski trying to pick out David's tall figure from the throng.

The young man was evidently discomfited to find Belinda was not present. He gave an eager glance round the table, then, failing to find the face he sought, his own grew clouded. He was a very good-looking young man, dark as Belinda was fair, with brilliant eyes of a deep shade of purple and long black lashes.

I welcomed him with a sweet smile to a seat next to mine.

"Belinda was so sorry she could not stay to see you," I said softly.

"Did she know I was coming?"

"Oh, yes, we heard about it from Sir Willoughby. He's full of your praises, besides"—I looked him straight in the eyes—"there was your letter this morning, you know."

"Oh, yes, my letter," he repeated, obviously embarrassed.

"She's gone out to lunch with the Duke," I continued. "A pity you should have missed her." I sighed with sympathy, and turned my attention to my lunch.

David meanwhile discoursed on cataracts and viaducts and irrigation, with considerable fluency and eloquence. Sir Willoughby was evidently impressed with him. I made up my mind to use my influence with the engineering magnate to get a position for young Carr—an influential and well-paid position—somewhere in the wilds of Africa! Tresham would do it for me, I felt sure.

After lunch I suggested that David Carr might like a chat with me.

He acquiesced a trifle unwillingly, and it was with an obstinate, not to say a sullen look, that he opened the conversation.

"Lady Carstairs," he said, "it is only fair for me to say that I am just as resolved about Belinda as when I last saw you on the matter. Is it worth while, therefore, to enter on a discussion which can only end in one way?"

"Mr. Carr," I answered, "the discussion will end in an unexpected, not to say unpleasant, fashion, if you are not wise. I am Belinda's guardian; as such I have the right to choose her associates, and the power to enforce my choice. If you persist in persecuting my charge—for your conduct amounts to persecution—you will compel me to an unpleasant course. I shall be forced to appeal to the protection of the law. I mean it," as the young man started to his feet, "I shall apply to the representative of British justice here in Cairo, and ask protection for Belinda. You cannot set the customs and decencies of society at defiance with impunity, Mr. Carr, as you will learn. Have you no thought, no consideration, for Belinda's reputation?"

The young man smiled.

"Society, I know, is scandalous and cruel," he remarked, "but even Society would hesitate to cast a slur upon Belinda She's so young, so sweet, so——"

"Thank you, I am as well aware of Belinda's good qualities as you. I again repeat if scandal circulates concerning her, you will be responsible for it. You must give me your word to abandon all idea of seeing or speaking to her in the future, or I shall appeal to the law. Belinda herself has no wish to see you, she gave her word to her father, and to me not to hold communication with you without my consent. And she knew quite well that consent I should never give. Your conduct is unmanly in the extreme. Belinda is beautiful, she is also an heiress——"

"You can spare me that sneer," he interrupted hotly. "If Belinda marries without her father's consent, she will not have a penny. That I know for a fact."

"And knowing that you would endeavour to persuade her into a clandestine marriage?"

"Not for an instant," he said quickly.

I smiled.

"Your marriage could never be anything but clandestine. Mr. North would not hear of it."

The young man became greatly agitated.

"I cannot give her up," he said, "and yet—" he paused. "Lady Carstairs, have a little pity for me, what can I do?"

"What we are all obliged to do some time or other, Mr. Carr, accept the inevitable. Resign yourself to give Belinda up."

The young man hesitated. Another minute and he would have given me his word, would have consented to put Belinda out of his life. But even as he hesitated, the words trembling on his lips, Belinda, most misguided maiden, suddenly appeared.

"David!" With a smile and a flush she flew to him with outstretched hands. He went towards her, and I shudder to think what might have happened had I not quickly interposed.

I stepped between them, laying my hand on Belinda's arm.

"Listen to me," I said firmly. "I'm not going to have a recurrence of what took place the other night. I did not blame you then, it was not altogether your fault. Now it is a different matter. Are you engaged to Mr. Carr?" I asked sneering.

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"N-no," said Belinda, blushing; "not exactly. But I should like to be."

"My darling!" interposed David.

"Belinda," I said firmly, "you and I must have an understanding. Either you promise, here and now, to obey me in regard to Mr. Carr, or I cable to your father to-night, and resign all care of you. I mean it. I will not be a party to deceiving Mr. North in the least degree. And you are deceiving him in intention, if not in fact. Tell this young man that you must decline to see him in the future, to receive his notes, to accept his messages, or to hold any communication with him whatsoever, or I cable to your father."

"Marry me at once, Belinda," urged David. "Your father will forgive you. Don't send me away, dearest, have courage to give yourself to me. It's our only chance of happiness. Something tells me that if we part now, we shall part for ever. *Belinda!*"

For a moment she hesitated. Her mouth quivered, her eyes filled with tears. Then—

"I can't, David," she said piteously. "I promised father I would stay with Lady Carstairs for a year at least. I cannot break my word."

"Promise me at least——"

Again I interrupted.

"I will have neither promises nor pledges. If Belinda gives you any, I resign my care of her. I owe it to Mr. North to prevent the least entanglement."

"Belinda, why not let Lady Carstairs cable to your father? If she gives you up he'll have to come and look after you himself. He won't be so hard-hearted, surely."

Belinda shook her head.

"He'd be worse, David," she answered. "Father would pack me off to the North Pole and get you sent to the South. And"—she paused—"I promised I'd stay with Lady Carstairs. It's no good, David, we must wait, that's all. Wait for a year. Then"—her voice shook, I thought she was going to break down. "I'll write to my father, David, and so can you, but I'm afraid it won't do any good."

"I shall stay in Cairo," said David fiercely. "If not at the Continental, then at Shepheard's. And I shall call here every day," and he glared at me defiantly.

"Best not, dear," said Belinda. "You can trust me, David. I must obey my father for a year, but *then*."

She clasped his hand, and for a moment the two young things gazed in each other's eyes. They made a beautiful couple, and in a play or a book I should have been quite sorry for them. As it was, I played the part of a cruel fate relentlessly, and did not even relax when David said farewell!

"Good-bye," he said hoarsely, "good-bye!" And the door closed behind him.

"For a year—only a year!" cried Belinda. "David, David, come back!"

She rushed towards the door, but I was too quick for her.

"Be quiet at once," I said sternly. "You're behaving very badly."

I left her to recover herself, and went to dress for our expedition with the Duke. A mere accident had been responsible for Belinda's untimely arrival. The Duke's watch had stopped. It might have had disastrous consequences; as it was, however, everything turned out satisfactorily.

Belinda had promised good behaviour for a year. And in a year many things would come to pass!

There were six of us going to the Pyramids. The Duke, Lord Davenant, and myself, Crawley, Midge, and Belinda. Honoria remained behind to give a welcome to Mark Striven.

We all assembled in the hall, all, that is to say, except Belinda.

Suddenly an awful scream rang through the house, a trampling of feet sounded in the corridor above—Belinda's corridor. And then a voice, hoarse with terror, shrieked.

"Help! Help! I tell you, help!"

That voice, that cry, merciful Heaven, was Belinda's!

(*What caused Belinda's terrible distress will be related next Tuesday.*)

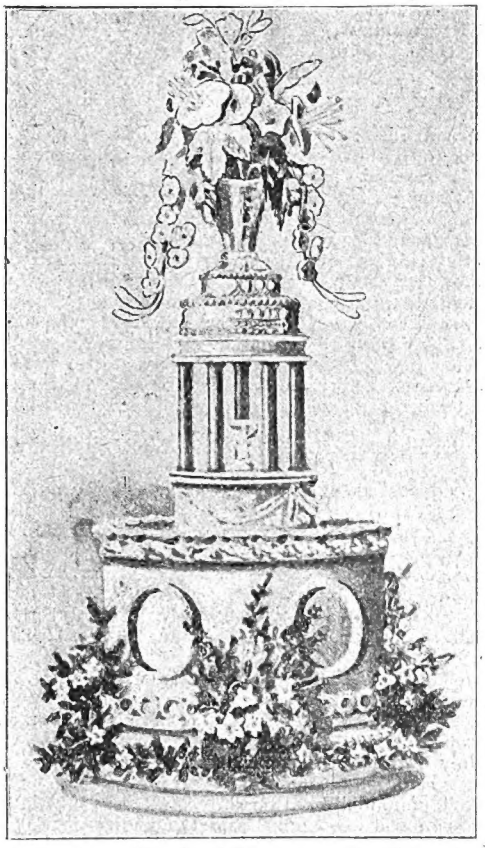
Miss Madge Morris

WILL BE MARRIED ON

Tuesday, the 2nd of December.

She chose Tuesday because it is the day on which *Short Stories* comes before its readers, and she has to thank this little paper mainly for her success.

And now I have a rather startling offer to make. We shall purchase a big wedding-cake for Miss Morris,



and after the wedding festivities are over it will be cut up, put into boxes, and sent to certain readers of the paper.

Altogether, a hundred delicious pieces of cake will be sent out.

Moreover, the beautiful centre ornament from the top of the cake will also be offered as a prize.

The conditions under which you will be entitled to receive a piece are as follows:

All you have to do is to sit down and write a short congratulatory letter to Miss Morris on the auspicious occasion of her marriage. The reader who sends what Miss Morris considers to be the best letter will receive the beautiful centre ornament from the top, and the senders of each of the next hundred best will receive a piece of the cake.

Send your attempt to Miss Madge Morris, "Short Stories" Office, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope "Wedding" in the top left-hand corner, to arrive not later than Monday, December 1st.

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For Marion's Sake.

An Adventure on a Tandem.

The lonely white road wound up and up endlessly before me, the sun beat on my head mercilessly, and the flies buzzed into my face in a manner only cyclists can appreciate.

The tandem seemed to increase in weight as I plugged slowly forward, until I was almost tempted to think some demon of spite had got astride the vacant back saddle.

Over two miles of ascent still to go and then that little lane, a couple of hundred yards of level way, and Marion's home would be reached—my goal.

How I longed for it; once there, tea and tenderness would soon make amends for my hot ride, we should admire the tandem at our leisure, while planning future delightful excursions to be undertaken when my daily work at the Bank was over, for Marion was a first-class pedaller.

I should explain that the young lady in question was my *fiancée*, and that we were to be married towards the end of the year. She lived with her father and aunt in a pretty little house just beyond the brow of the hill up which I was toiling; at the foot of it, behind me lay Ellingham, while in the distance could be seen the haze of smoke which hung over busy Birmingham.

"A trying climb this, sir!" said a voice suddenly at my side.

A good-looking, clean-shaven young fellow was breaking into a trot to keep up with me.

"May I suggest, sir," he continued, "if you will excuse a stranger, that if you will allow me to mount, you will lessen your work, you would also do me a great favour, we are going in the same direction."

"By all means," I responded gladly, bringing the tandem to a halt at the side of the path. "I am going as far as Woodview."

"Woodview?" said the young man with a start, looking at me with sudden interest.

"Yes," I answered, growing suspicious in a moment; "do you know it?"

"Only by name," he replied carelessly; "I am almost a stranger here."

"Well, jump up," I answered.

"If you will allow me," said the young man, "I will mount in front, I am heavier than you are; it will make us travel better."

"Very good," I answered, seeing the force of his remark.

How that fellow could go! Onward and upward we flew; at length, in spite of the heat, his energy infected me, and I found myself ankling away eagerly.

He maintained a silence during the ascent. At length we arrived at the top where a cooling breeze greeted us.

Before us the hill dipped at a steeper gradient into the flat country beyond, while, just in front of us to the right, I could see the line of trees which ran along the lane to Marion's home.

"We are nearly at my destination now," I said, as he swung low over the handle bars and began to pedal more rapidly than ever.

"Yes, indeed," he replied.

"Hullo, man, steady!" I cried, "you will go past the lane at this rate."

"Oh, no, I shall slow up soon enough."

"I say," I cried again, "can't you pull up, here's the turn."

For answer he only worked harder. The machine swerved slightly as I endeavoured to guide it round.

"Steady," he roared, "or you will be killed." In another moment we were far down the road in a whirl of dust.

"What do you mean by this conduct," I exclaimed, now thoroughly angry. It dawned upon me that this was some reckless bounder, who wished to get a lift at my expense. "I see your game, but you will find you are dealing with the wrong man."

"Don't try to stop now," he answered doggedly; "we shall both be killed if you do, and that would mar your satisfaction at finishing me. But let me beg of you," he continued earnestly, "not to make a fuss when we get to the bottom. Don't tell anyone about this ride," he glanced over his shoulder for a moment; "for Marion's sake. I can't explain now."

"What on earth do you mean?" I cried in utter astonishment.

"I can't explain now," he repeated; "you shall know all later on."

He relapsed into silence. Indeed, there was little time or power for speech in that breakneck rush; all our energies went in holding on like grim death. The brake was on the front wheel and my companion did not use it.

Now a lumbering load of hay appeared before us, zig-zagging down the steep incline.

He rang the bell madly, but the lethargic countryman could not be aroused.

How the mad rider did it, I do not know; calculating the position to a nicety, he shot through the couple of feet of space allowed us, in safety, the hay sweeping stingingly against our faces as we did so.

We scarcely heard the growling exclamation of the driver, we must have been a quarter of a mile away before he had finished.

Then the descent became less steep as it sloped towards the level country.

Before us, a railway line wound through the fields, while the tall signal posts of a little wayside station rose on our left.

Suddenly my companion sat up, and the hiss of the brake told me that our journey was at an end.

Pulling up by the side of the road we dismounted, covered with dust and streaming with perspiration.

"We part here," said the madman, for that he was one, I was, by this time, firmly convinced.

"I am more grateful to you than I can tell for the assistance you have given me. You have, you will be glad to hear, done a service for one you love. Good-bye, sir"—stretching out his hand—"I am sincerely sorry for the trouble I have given you."

I found myself shaking hands with this strange man in silent amazement.

"But tell me——" I began.

"Nothing now," he interrupted promptly; "it would be neither advisable nor is there time."

A long whistle sounded down the line.

He started, and again wishing me a hurried "Good-bye," he ran towards the station.

The train came slowly to a standstill and I saw him spring lightly into it. He turned slightly as he did so, and I saw that he now wore a light beard.

What did it all mean? At all events here I was, I had to face a mile and a half of stiff hill, puzzled, dust-covered and tired as I was.

There was nothing for it, so I started stiffly to face my task.

In a short time I met the haycart coming slowly towards me. The carter gazed at me stupidly and pulled up his horse.

"Be you one o' they chaps that buzzed past me just now up there?"—he jerked his head backward

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"Yes I am," I replied.

"Be you mad?" was his next query.

"Well, no, I hope not," I answered half laughing.

"If you bean't, t'other chap wuz," was his ultimatum as he cracked his whip and resumed his journey.

Certainly I did not blame him for his deduction.

At length I arrived at Woodview; Marion was in the garden talking earnestly to her father.

As the gate swung open they turned towards me. What was this? No sign of pleasure on their white faces.

"How are you, my boy" said Mr. Duncan kindly. Then turning to his daughter, he continued: "Do as you think best, Marion, I can trust you to act rightly," and without another word, he entered the house.

"Marion, dear, what is the matter?" I asked anxiously.

"Oh, Jack, I can't tell you," said the girl with a sob; "but we mustn't be engaged any more—we mustn't really—it's for your sake Jack, indeed it is, but I must break it off."

"Marion, what is it?" I cried aghast.

"I can't tell you, dear, you'll know soon enough, to-night perhaps, but you must take this now"—and she drew a flashing circlet from her hand.

"Has it anything to do with the fellow I met on the road," I asked, my head in a whirl from all the strange events of the afternoon.

"What fellow?" said Marion eagerly.

I then told her what had happened and described the man I had met.

"Yes," she said, when I had finished; "that must have been Dick—my step-brother—you know I have often spoken about him—and you helped him"—after a pause—"yes, I do thank you—and now dear, please go; I want to be alone." And I went, sorely stricken and puzzled.

I walked back to the town slowly. The newspaper boys were shouting "Speshul" with more than ordinary eagerness.

"Great robbery in Birmingham. £10,000 stolen. Escape of the criminals!"

Hastily buying a paper I tore it open. I somehow felt that here was a key to the mystery.

There it was, sure enough, in white and black.

"A daring robbery has been perpetrated on the well-known firm of Messrs. Trucott and Willis, of Birmingham, whereby they have lost a sum of about £10,000. It appears that to meet some special calls, gold to the above amount had been placed in the firm's safe, the night before last.

"Besides the partners, but two men; Henry Thomas and Richard Trent"—Heavens! that was Marion's brother—"both trusted employées, had access to the safe. Thomas, the elder of the two, did not return to work after luncheon yesterday, but Trent, who lodged with him, finished his day as usual.

"The robbery was discovered before business hours this morning by Mr. Willis who went early to the office to have some letters typed. Somehow Trent must have got wind of this, for when the police went to arrest him at his lodgings, he had fled. He had, however, the audacity to address a letter to the firm, declaring that he was innocent."

That was all, but it was enough. I had helped a criminal to escape. I had seen his disguise as he entered the train. At all events I could put the police on his track. Stay!—Marion's brother—his words came back to me. "Don't tell anyone about this ride, for Marion's sake."

What was I to do? I hurried to my lodgings and threw myself into a chair. Marion had released me because she believed him guilty. Was it only a dodge on his part to work on my feelings—that mention of Marion's name? How had he known me?

I confess I never felt so perplexed in my life. Liverpool would swallow him up and hide him, as it had many before if I only held my tongue.

At length I resolved to do nothing. Marion, of course, was the chief factor in this decision, but somehow the man struck me as honest, and then there was his letter—perhaps there was more in it than the newspaper reporter supposed.

I rose next morning and set about my business with a heavy heart. I had never for an instant wavered in my feelings towards my *fiancée*, and, now that I knew all, I was determined to go out to Woodview as soon as possible and set things straight between us.

It was with a sigh of relief that at four o'clock I turned the key in my desk and set out on my mission.

Again I traversed that long white hill but in a very different mood from that of the day before. Then all was well, now a cloud of trouble hung over the house of my beloved.

There she was in the garden; I almost fancied that she was waiting for me.

I need not go into our conversation during the next half hour, it suffices to say that as we sat there together in the evening sunlight something again sparkled on the third finger of her left hand.

The gate swung open.

"A telegraph boy," cried Marion; "what can it be?"

"Miss Duncan, ninepence to pay for delivery," said the stolid youth.

Marion seized the envelope and tore it open with trembling fingers, then, with a glad cry, she handed me the slip of paper.

"*Have caught thief*—DICK."

"Here, boy, keep the change," I cried joyfully, tossing a half a crown to the youngster, who pocketed it with a grin.

"Father, father, come here, it's all right!"

Mr. Duncan appeared at the door.

"It's all right, father, Dick is innocent and he has caught the thief, see, here is his telegram."

"Thank Heaven," said Mr. Duncan fervently; "I am as glad for your sake my dear girl, as for him, and you, my dear fellow," he said, turning to me; "you did not desert us in our trouble."

For answer Marion shyly held out her left hand. "Ah, I see," said her father, smiling. "Well, Jack is no fair weather friend—now, I suppose, neither of you want me particularly just now."

The short account of his adventures, told us by Dick Trent himself, is the best way in which I can tell his story.

"You know I lodged with Thomas," he began. "A quiet, decent sort of fellow. On the day he bolted I went out before him, but, having forgotten my gloves, I ran back. I found him closing a small, strong leather bag. He seemed greatly put out at my reappearance, but I thought nothing of it at the time.

"When I returned from the office, as you know, he was not there. Although I had not the slightest idea of the truth, I took a look through his papers, to see if he had left any message.

"I found nothing but a scrap of crumpled paper with a Liverpool address on it, and a time table. I went to bed late that night. I could only think that he had been intrusted by the firm with some sudden and important business.

"Just as I was starting for work next morning a boy brought me a note. '£10,000 missing at office. T. and you suspected.—R. S.'"

"Who is 'R. S.'?" I asked.

"R. S. is the young lady typewriter," said Dick with a blush, but that is another story.

"I did not know what to do; if I gave myself up, I thought that the possible delay might let Thomas slip off, besides—I suppose I was a fool—I wanted to do a bit of good 'on my own,' if I could. I can see how it all worked out beautifully against me, now.

"Well, to make a long story short, I ran and walked from Birmingham to Ellingham. I knew that the stations were watched, and by the aid of my future brother-in-law, I managed to catch a train to Liverpool.

"There, at the address I had found—Thomas' only slip—I ran my gentleman to earth in a quiet lodging, with all his cash."

"How did you know I was Marion's *fiancé?*" I asked.

"By that little locket on your chain," replied Trent smiling. "I ought to know it, for Marion commissioned me to buy it."

That is the whole story. Dick Trent is now in Thomas' position, with excellent prospects. As for R. S., well, there is to be a double wedding some time about Christmas.

C. G. F. Chute.

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The Coward.

WHOSE BRAVERY WON HIM A WIFE.

A DREADFUL panic passed in an instant down the narrow-crowded street. Women screamed helplessly and fled, clutching at their children as they ran. Men shouted impossible directions while they fought blindly to reach a place of safety. Scarcely half a dozen people retained any semblance of self-possession, and even these were helpless against the surging multitude. The panic was terrible, the confusion became worse every moment.

"Stop! Hold it! Catch the bridle! Pull it back!"

The crowd, acting on blind instinct, divided into two portions scarcely separated from each other. Through the narrow passage thus formed, the runaway horse swept like a whirlwind, his nostrils distended, eyes bloodshot, neck and shoulders flecked with foam. The rider, a girl apparently not much out of her teens, had lost all control over the animal, and only retained her seat with difficulty.

About a hundred yards further, the street turned at right angles into a narrow footpath, and practically ended in a high stone wall.

A terrible cry arose from the crowd as they realised the almost inevitable tragedy. The girl herself seemed to lose her presence of mind, she began to sway helplessly in the saddle, her hands left the reins and grasped the saddle bow with despairing energy.

At that moment a man dashed forward and seized the hanging reins with his right hand and then with both. It was not a time for gentle measures. He pulled ferociously, savagely, as though he would wrench the animal's mouth asunder. He was whirled from the ground and swept forward apparently helpless. If he loosened his grip of the reins for one moment he would assuredly have been under the horse's hoofs the next.

But he hung on with grim determination, a quality quite as useful in mastering animals as men. The runaway fought on a few steps more, then hesitated, and finally stood still, his hide steaming, trembling in every limb. As for the man who had just conquered him, he sank to the ground, apparently seriously injured.

As soon as affairs reached this stage, the supply of heroes became greater than the demand. One assisted the girl to the ground, another attended to her refractory steed, while yet a third enlisted the services of a cabman.

Grace Lauraine accompanied her rescuer, bidding the man drive to the nearest doctor. This by good luck happened to be the medical adviser to the Lauraine family, and an aspirant, indeed, for a still closer connection with at least one member of it.

Doctor Horace Lloyd welcomed his visitors with great pleasure. He was very pleased Miss Lauraine had brought the gentleman who had saved her life to his house instead of to the hospital. Of course, anyone who had been able to do Miss Lauraine a service was a person to be courted—not to say envied, added the gallant doctor. Miss Lauraine had thought of—oh, nonsense! Wouldn't hear of such a thing. Mr. Dean Howard—he hoped he had the name correctly—must stay with him, for a while, at any rate.

He poured out all this and a great deal more at such a rate that Miss Lauraine was scarcely able to say a word, much less refuse his offer. It is probable indeed that in her heart she was grateful for his kindness, and, as this was exactly the reward which he coveted, the arrangement was satisfactory all round.

At this moment the housekeeper entered to say the bed-room was ready for the invalid. Miss Lauraine took her leave, promising to call next day, her rescuer was carefully carried upstairs and put to bed, and the doctor himself, after all these matters were satisfactorily arranged, returned to his study feeling he had at least turned into the unfrequented path—for it is *not* a highway, with all deference to the phrasemaker—which would lead him to success.

A small leather pocket-case lying upon the floor attracted his attention as he entered the room. He picked it up, guessing immediately that it had fallen from Dean Howard's pocket, as they lifted him from the sofa. A glance inside the pocket-case, while it verified his surmise, only increased his curiosity, a feeling which he had always subordinated to honour. He took a seat by the fire and carefully set himself to learn the visitor's history.

The first half-dozen papers he looked at were unimportant, except for the fact that they proved Dean Howard to be a gentleman both by birth and education, albeit fallen upon somewhat evil days. Presently, however, the doctor came to a letter written by a woman of considerable age, if the long, quavering loops, and the rigid appearance of the smaller strokes, could be relied upon.

The doctor read this letter several times, and each time with increasing astonishment. When he had thoroughly mastered its contents, he replaced it, and put the pocket-case in his desk to be returned to the owner at the first opportunity.

Doctor Horace Lloyd was a man who deceived himself almost as much as he deceived other people, which was saying a great deal. His desire to be the husband of Grace Lauraine sprang from purely mercenary motives, a fact he would be the last to admit, even to himself. He was a man who could play boldly when the stakes were sufficiently high to tempt him. In the present instance he judged that the frequent visits which he anticipated Miss Lauraine would make to his house, coupled with the remembrance of his kindness to her rescuer, could not fail to advance his wooing. In his own mind he tried to convince himself, with considerable success, that his hospitality was merely a proof of his generous heart.

As luck would have it, Mrs. Lauraine took a great liking to Dean Howard, that sort of wistful affection often evinced by ladies who are nearing the meridian, towards young men of their acquaintance.

So far the game was going exactly as the doctor wished, for the good lady developed a habit of making frequent visits to his house, accompanied by her daughter. On these occasions the invalid, who was fast becoming a convalescent, would be assisted downstairs, and the evening pass all too quickly.

This probably applied more to the invalid himself than to any of the others. He had only his own thoughts for company during the greater part of the day. These naturally led him

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to the occasions when the monotony of solitude was relieved by Mrs. Lauraine and her daughter. He began to anticipate their visits with dangerous longing, but it was only a chance remark by one of the others which revealed to his mind how much the presence of Grace Lauraine added to his happiness.

Affairs were drawing to a climax all round. The maternal eye of Mrs. Lauraine soon discovered the direction in which both the doctor and his guest were drifting, and although she appreciated in the state of affairs a compliment to herself (as indeed she did in nearly everything that happened, in which she was at all concerned), the situation was nevertheless perplexing. From the personal point of view she preferred Dean Howard, but then she knew practically nothing of his character or social position. He was curiously reticent on the latter point. On the other hand, the doctor was undoubtedly a rising man in his profession; steady, clever, well connected, but—Mrs. Lauraine had set her heart upon the other man.

Two or three evenings later Dr. Lloyd went far towards solving her difficulties. Under a pretext of showing her a new suite of furniture he had purchased, he led the way to his study. As soon as he had installed his visitor in a cosy armchair by the fire—

"My dear Mrs. Lauraine," he said soothingly, as though he were addressing a patient, "I have a very painful communication to make to you. Please don't move," he added, as she started in some alarm to her feet, "it won't take me long to say what I have to say. Afterwards you can judge for yourself whether I was justified in telling you."

Mrs. Lauraine had not belonged to the feminine sex for fifty years for nothing. She began to simmer in a state of gentle curiosity.

"It concerns our mutual friend, Mr. Howard," continued the smooth, hard voice. "He dropped a pocket-book in the hall the other day. The housemaid brought it to me, and thinking it belonged to a patient, I opened it in order to discover the owner. The first paper I looked at was a letter beginning 'My dear boy,' and signed 'Your disappointed mother, Catherine Howard.'"

"*His* mother," murmured Mrs. Lauraine.

"Precisely! Of course I only noticed the signature after reading the letter through."

"Yes, of course. And what did she—what was in the letter?"

It was a pity that the smile upon the doctor's face was not visible to Mrs. Lauraine, owing to his having purposely chosen a seat in a dark corner.

"In her letter," continued the smooth voice, into which there crept a faint ring of triumph, "Mrs. Howard disowned her son. She said he had disgraced the family for ever. He had made their name a byword in the county. He had committed an unpardonable crime."

The girl was swaying helplessly in the saddle, when suddenly a man dashed forward and seized the hanging reins with both his hands.

Mrs. Lauraine saw her favourite being pulled to pieces; but she made no sign of protest. Her daughter's happiness was at stake, and, although the doctor's news hurt her more than she would have cared to confess, she steeled herself to endure, though she could not entirely conceal the distress she felt. Surely the feeling which caused her to push her chair back among the shadows was pardonable.

"They had obtained for him a commission in the 175th Hussars, in which he had risen to the rank of captain. When the South African trouble broke out, his regiment was ordered to the front. During the great fight at Glencoe he disappeared. It was thought he had been taken by the enemy, but after the battle he was discovered in his tent, white-faced and trembling. White faced and trembling!" he repeated, with merciless emphasis. "He said he had been taken ill; anyhow, he sent in his papers immediately afterwards and retired, but certainly not 'without a stain on his character' as they say."

Mrs. Lauraine sank still further back amongst the shadows, feeling that her latest ideal was irretrievably shattered. Herself the daughter of a soldier, and a V.C. at that, she had always been taught that cowardice was the one unforgivable sin. She remembered how Dean Howard had told her, only the other day, that he was the nephew of a retired general, whose displeasure, however, he had incurred. But even yet, though sorely assailed, her woman's heart refused to yield its faith without a struggle.

"He showed no signs of cowardice when he saved Grace's life," she said, speaking with the greater warmth because she instinctively felt her cause was unworthy of it.

"No one is either a hero or a coward all his life," said the doctor carelessly. "Human nature, or rather human character, is not unlike a pendulum."

"Did Mrs. Howard's letter tell you all this?" asked Mrs. Lauraine, firing her last shot, "I should scarcely have expected her to go so much into detail."

"She did not do so. The letter merely showed me where to look, and I obtained most of the information from an old newspaper file. But, my dear Mrs. Lauraine," he said earnestly, trying in vain to banish the ring of triumph which ran like an undercurrent through all he said. "I hope you understand how painful this duty has been to me. In these few weeks he has become more to me than many friends I have known all my life."

"It's very creditable to you," stammered Mrs. Lauraine, who was completely upset, "I am sure—it has been a shock—quite a shock—of course it's utterly impossible—now—I must tell—must arrange——"

"I thought it my duty to let you know," continued the doctor, gauging her weak, good-natured face with professional accuracy. "They are alone now," he added, as though speaking to himself.

"Come," said Mrs. Lauraine, speaking with that unnatural energy sometimes displayed by easy-

going people, "let us return to the drawing-room, they will think we are lost."

The inevitable reaction overtook her as she entered the drawing-room, closely followed by the doctor. She felt a vague desire to sit down somewhere by herself and have a good cry. Then a sudden anger possessed her against the man who had so upset her peace of mind and disturbed the harmony of affairs generally.

But all these vague fits of petulance disappeared in a moment before the shock of another surprise, greater if possible than that she had already experienced.

Dean Howard advanced slowly to meet her, leading Grace by the hand. One glance at her daughter's face told its unerring tale to Mrs. Lauraine. She turned towards the doctor with a mute interrogation, in which dismay and triumph were curiously blended.

"With your consent, Mrs. Lauraine, Grace has promised to become my wife." Then he turned his honest eyes towards the doctor. "We have no secrets from you, Horace," he added, "you have been more than a friend to both of us."

The doctor dashed the proffered hand aside. For once in his life he was completely taken by surprise. The inherent brutality of his nature broke away from all restraint.

"I congratulate you," he sneered, "on having surprised me. I did not think it possible. As for the other matter, I will reserve my congratulations until Mrs. Lauraine sanctions them."

Dean Howard and Grace looked from one to the other in utter bewilderment. Mrs. Lauraine made a slight forward movement in answer to the doctor's challenge.

"I think—would you—will you come into the next room, Mr. Howard," she said, "if Dr. Lloyd will kindly allow us?"

The doctor bowed and smiled. But it was not a pleasant smile by any means.

At this moment the door was suddenly opened from the other side. The little housemaid, trembling with a sense of sudden importance, announced the arrival of General Sir Poynter Howard.

The gallant general was in the room almost before she had reluctantly allowed the last syllables of his name to pass from her lips. He bowed vaguely to them all, but it was towards Dean Howard that his glance was mainly directed, and it was Dean Howard's hand he grasped in a decidedly friendly manner.

"My dear boy," he cried presently, when the introductions were complete. "Why on earth didn't you let me know of your illness? I only heard of it accidentally. Always risking his life for other people," he added, turning to the astonished doctor, "ever since he was an Eton boy."

Mrs. Lauraine began to feel more and more mystified. Surely the General would scarcely speak of his nephew in this affectionate, almost admiring way if the latter were indeed a coward. She glanced appealingly towards the doctor, but was met by a stony stare.

As a matter of fact, that worthy was beginning to feel more uncomfortable than Mrs. Lauraine herself. His native shrewdness already suggested the mistake which had been made, and the same useful quality was presently employed in considering how best to extricate himself all round.

With the arrival of the General, the question which had previously caused so much commotion appeared to have been temporarily postponed by general consent. Dean Howard, who was too honest himself to distrust other people easily, had already satisfied himself in his own mind as to the probable reason for his friend's sudden fit of rudeness, and when the doctor presently seated himself beside Grace, he smiled with renewed pleasure. Probably Horace wished to beg her pardon, he thought. Well, he knew she was not hard-hearted, and especially not at that moment. And as for himself, he had won the prize for which they had both striven, and the winner can always afford to be magnanimous.

"Can you ever forgive me for my boorish display just now?" murmured the doctor to Grace.

"I hardly expected it from you of all people," she said reproachfully, "and after all your previous kindness."

"You can surely guess the reason?" he whispered excitedly. "The news was quite unexpected; I had hoped—no matter what; I have no real excuse, and can only throw myself on your forgiveness. I have lost everything else."

Dr. Lloyd excelled in two useful arts. He was a consummate actor, and he understood the ramifications of that wonderful maze—a woman's heart—to perfection. In the present instance he said just enough for his purpose and not one word more. And as he expected, and indeed intended, he was forgiven as thoroughly and heartily as only a woman can forgive.

"I suppose you'll be leaving us all now and setting up house in great state near Dean's uncle," he said presently.

Grace shook her head doubtfully. "I don't know how the General will take the news of our engagement," she said; "he seems friendly enough now, but it seems he practically disowned Dean only three months ago."

"Hard luck," murmured the doctor, trying to restrain his eagerness, "College bills, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, nothing of that sort. Do you remember a few years ago reading in the paper about a young soldier named Howard, who was practically dismissed from the Army for cowardice at Glencoe?"

The doctor bent his head thoughtfully to one side ere he replied with a doubtful affirmative.

"Well, that was the General's only son. After the scandal the son left home. The General gave him five hundred pounds to leave the country, and then asked Dean to take his place as the son of the family and heir to everything. Dean refused, out of a feeling of honour towards the scapegoat. The General was very choleric and—and they parted."

The thought of that misleading letter lingered still in the doctor's mind. "I suppose the mother didn't like her son being sent away, coward though he was?"

"Dean showed me a letter she had written to him—to her son," she added, "saying how disappointed she was. She addressed it to Dean in mistake, being in such terrible trouble, and so upset at the time. It reached him on the same day he saved my life, and he has since returned it."

The doctor had had quite enough of explanation by this time, but one thing more remained to be done. He made his way across the room and explained the mistake to his fellow conspirator, binding her over to secrecy in their joint interest. Mrs. Lauraine was only too pleased to promise anything so long as she could keep her good opinion of Dean Howard.

"By-the-bye," said the General presently, producing a newspaper cutting with great pride and handing it over to his nephew, "Your cousin has turned out all right after all. Joined the ranks of the 14th Hussars and sailed with them to the Cape. And now he's been mentioned in despatches and promised a commission, and will probably get the V.C. as well," added the old soldier, unable to retain his pride. He turned towards his nephew with a sudden remembrance—"It's as well you didn't take me at my word the other day. The old homestead will go down in regular succession now, I suppose, but anyhow, the Grange at Silstead is yours whenever you like to settle down there—find a wife and that sort of thing."

The young man sprang to his feet at this unexpected but delightful offer.

"I have already found a wife, uncle," he said, "if her mother will only consent."

Mrs. Lauraine raised no objections this time. And the General, who had taken a fancy to Grace from the moment he entered the room, smiled approvingly all round.

Frank Wall.

KIND PARTY: "Why are you crying like that, my little boy?" Little Boy: "Cause it's the only way I know how."

"I NEVER give money to beggars in the streets," said the pedestrian. "But, my dear sir," returned the beggar, "I can't afford an office these hard times. You expect too much."

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HOLD YOUR PEACE.

A Tale of a Modern Enoch Arden.

"TELL us a story, Gentleman Joe—unless we are all to cut each other's throats in this awful heat."

The sun had gone down, a ball of liquid fire in piled up cloudsoforange, tipped with bronze. The sky was like copper. In all the wide plain not a breath of air stirred. The weather was of that quality that works madness in men's blood; slight provocations brought about quarrels to the death.

Gentleman Joe turned slowly round from his contemplation of the camp fire we were bound to keep going because of the beasts that roamed the plain at night. We made it as small as we dared.

"Tell you a story, mates? My best are all told."

Gentleman Joe passed his hand through his scanty, grey locks, and mopped the perspiration from his face. He looked round the group with keen, kindly eyes, and smiled.

"Dig something more out of your memory, old man," Big Dan said eagerly, "give us a yarn to make us forget this blooming plain." Well, his language was not as mild as I have put it, I tone it down for civilised folks.

"Yes, go on, old chap. Who's got a chance of sleeping on a night like this? Give us something to think of besides the heat!"

A great red moon climbed into the copper sky over the edge of the plain. Away to the south, angry voices of beasts disputing over their prey were carried to us on the breathless night. Someone threw a stick on the fire to keep it smouldering. Then we lay still—as still as the heat would let us, whilst Gentleman Joe yarned to us. We had always called him that ever since he joined us. God knows whether he had a real right to the title, but our roughest chaps paid him a sort of deference. We never knew what his antecedents had been—none of us ever knew.

He was silent a moment before he began that yarn. His eyes looked far away over the greyness of the plain under the red moon. Then he said:

"Reminds me of a harvest moon at home."

Some of us stirred uneasily. Queer recollections came to most of us, I expect, but nobody spoke, and he went on:

"I haven't got any of the usual tales in my head to-night. I guess that moon—and—and other things, make me think of old England, and of something that happened to me. 'Twas a queer sort of a business, and I don't say that I was right in what I did. I don't say I was wrong either. I've often thought about it since, and wondered. I did what came into my mind to do at the minute. God knows I acted for the best—but sometimes I wonder whether I did right—or wrong.

"I'm getting on in years now. It all happened many and many a year ago, but it comes back to me to-night as if it was yesterday. I was a young chap—when I last saw a harvest moon rise over a cornfield at home."

He stopped for a minute, and I could have sworn somebody choked and gulped. Men get a bit foolish when the heat takes hold of their brains, and they begin to think of green lanes, and trees, and of grass that isn't as brown as the sand on the sea shore.

None of us said a word, and Gentleman Joe went on. I believe he had forgotten the place where he was, and the still, deadly heat, and everything, except that cornfield somewhere in old England.

"I was courting in harvest time," he said; "we would walk together across the field of wheat in the sunset—she and I—and the wind would sweep down from the heath a quarter of a mile away, and bend the ears of corn, and make the red poppies bow their heads. Beyond the wheatfield was a field of barley—gold and silver she used to call them, when they shone in the sunset light as the sun dropped behind the elms in the lane.

"She was only a slip of a girl, and I was little more than a boy, but we were to be married in October. Her home and mine lay close together; I had known her always, and I—well, I was mad about her. I can see her now—walking over the cornfield, and looking back to laugh at me and call me sentimental. Ah! I was a hot wooer, and an impatient one. Her eyes were blue as the speedwell in the hedges, her face was like a briar rose—I was mad about her," he repeated slowly, "I thought—she cared for me the same as I did for her. Perhaps—she did—then. Perhaps it isn't ever fair to compare a man's love with a girl's.

"I only know I walked in Heaven those days. Sometimes we went over the fields in the evening, after the corn was cut, and it stood in sheaves among the stubble, and a great red moon came up over the elms. The world was fairyland to me—then.

"We were to be married in October, and then I was to go out West to a ranche that was waiting for me. In the Spring I was to come back and fetch Kitty. That was the plan. But plans don't always pan out right, any more than other things do." His usually gentle voice suddenly sounded hard, but it softened again at once.

"Well, we were married in October—Kitty and I—and I was the happiest chap in the British Empire that day. She looked—I can't tell you how she looked on her—wedding day. Her white gown shone as she came up the church to my side, and the sun came in through the coloured glass of the windows, and made great purple splashes over its whiteness.

"An old chum of hers and mine—Dick Lane, I'll call him—was my best man. I never guessed—not then—that he had felt for Kitty something of what I felt for her and that she——

"Never mind about that. She and I were married. We walked down the church path together, man and wife—and the yellow leaves of the chestnut tree made a carpet for us to walk on to the lych gate.

"There was a cottage down the lane. Kitty and I went there, and for a month I was happy as a king. Nothing came to spoil my happiness. Life seemed to stretch before me like a path of gold.

"And then I went away. I left my wife there, in our little home, where she had old friends about her, and my mother just up the road to take care of her till I could fetch her in the Spring. Her own people, too, were close at hand; I felt she would be safe. It gladdened me to leave her as my wife; I had had hard work to persuade her to marry me so quickly, but she had agreed at last, and I thought that she was as happy as I. But the parting was bitter—the parting was bitter.

He was silent again after those words—a long, long silence.

"I went West," he resumed abruptly, "and got started with my ranche. I prospered mightily. Nothing has prospered so well with me since. Perhaps I have never had much heart for it! When I was getting ready Kitty's home, everything went well. I felt myself just the luckiest chap alive. I could have sung all day for gladness. I counted the days till Spring should come, and I panned out just how everything would be when she and I drove up to the ranche together.

"That didn't all pan out the same as I meant either. There's

a funny sort of muddle sometimes about this business we call Life.

"I built my house, mostly with my own hands, my mate on the ranche giving me a help now and then. I tell you I made that house a cosy place for my little girl, and the room that was to be her sitting-room was the one I spent most thought and time over. I tried to see it all with her eyes—the eyes of a girl fresh from the old country—and I don't believe she'd have been dissatisfied with it if she'd got there.

"But she never came—she never came."

Another long, long pause whilst the red moon climbed higher in the copper sky, and turned slowly into a golden ball that seemed to hang far down into the plain.

"Life out West was wild in those days—wilder by a long chalk than it is now," he said at last. "You've heard my tales about the times we had with Indians. But you never knew before, that when I was raided there on the ranche, and taken to the Apache camp, I had a wife waiting for me in England. I never told you that, I didn't seem able to talk about it before even though it's half a lifetime and more ago—half a lifetime and more ago," he repeated like one in a dream.

"I haven't got to go into all the story of that raid again, you know about that. You know, because I've told you over and over again how they came upon me when my mate was away in the township and I was alone. They drove off my beasts, and they burnt the house I'd built for Kitty, and they carried me away—and for seven long years I never heard my mother tongue nor saw a white man's face.

"It's no use to tell you about those years. Most of it you know already. What I haven't told, I can't tell now, and that's the awful agony I went through thinking of my girl waiting for me in the old country, and fancying what her anguish must be. It won't bear talking about—even now. Then I got free—you know that tale too—and my first thought was to make tracks for England, and put my poor little wife out of her torture. Mind you, I was certain it must be the same torture for her as it had been for me—only worse, because she had had the burden of suspense to carry.

"Many and many a time my heart grew sick with longing in those weeks before I set foot in England, and started on the last bit of my journey. I had to tramp it. Maybe I was foolish—maybe wise, but something inside me prevented me from sending to let my friends know that I was coming. An awful terror that they might be dead, and Kitty too, made me dread to write to them. I thought I would just tramp home to see for myself.

"It was Spring time when I reached the village.

"The cuckoos were calling across the cornfield, and the larks sprang from under my feet, singing as only English larks can sing. The elms were bursting into leaf, the high hedges in the lane were covered with primroses, in the cottage gardens I saw great clumps of daffodils.

"Round the old church the rooks wheeled and cawed. Everything looked so exactly as it had looked when I went away, that I took heart and began to think I'd been a fool for my fears.

"But something still held me back from going straight to the cottage where I had left Kitty. Maybe I was afraid she wouldn't know me now I was a rough-looking tramp with a beard into the bargain.

"I noticed that the people who passed me in the lane showed no sign of recognition, it brought back my fears again.

"Presently, as I came to the lych gate, I saw a lot of people in the churchyard, folks going and coming, and a kind of look of bustle. The chestnut tree that was yellow when I went away was putting out green fingers now. It made my heart beat to see them!

"A boy slouched up to the gate. It was nobody I knew, so I said to him:

"'What's to do in the church to-day?'

"'Wedding,' he answered, all short, country fashion.

"'And whose wedding might it be?' I asked, wondering whether it was one of my old friends.

"'Widder Craven's wedding,' he said.

"Then I gave a great jump and looked at him.

"Craven was my name—or, rather, the name I'm giving you for mine—and I thought it must be my mother he meant—my mother who had been a widow for years and years.

"'Widow Craven?' I said, after him.

"'Yus, widow Craven, she's going to marry Muster Dick Lane. She lives in the cottage down the lane. Her first husband he went to foreign parts, seven years ago, and he was killed by the Indians—scalped they do say.'

"I caught at the gate and stared hard at the boy. I couldn't say a word, something struck me dumb.

"'What's up, muster,' he said, eyeing me uneasily, 'did you know poor Muster Craven?'

"'Yes—no—at least, I've heard of him,' I said, pulling myself together under the lad's fixed gaze. 'So he's dead, is he?'

"'Yus, he's dead right enough. His widow, she waited to know for sure that he was dead, and his mate brought home some of his things to her, so they say. So she's going to marry Muster Lane. Some say he was her first love. Maybe you'd like to see the wedding, muster? They're coming down the street now.'

"I turned and looked up the village, towards the cottage by the cornfield where I had said good-bye to Kitty, and I could see a party of folks coming along the highway, and I felt something inside me freeze into stone as I looked.

"I could have begun by knocking the lad down when he told me that tale, now I just felt dumb.

"I turned away from him, and walked up the churchyard path and into the church. It was full of people, as it had been for my wedding seven years before, but though many heads were turned as I went in, nobody knew me. I crept into a place beside the door and waited.

"I could see my mother far up the aisle. She looked older, but there was no sign of recent sorrow on her face. She had got used to my loss by that time, I supposed!

"I heard one woman say to another.

"'Poor old Mrs. Craven, this day will call her son to her mind.'

"'Aye, poor old lady,' said the other, 'twas sad too her son dying like that amongst the savages. But Muster Lane he's as good as a son to her, takes care of her rarely well, and he's waited faithful for young mistress Craven, there's no doubt of that.'

"'And 'tis true she cared for him before ever she married the other, so they say for a fact,' whispered the first woman. 'She only married young Craven because she couldn't fight against his wooing, and because her father and mother were so set on the match. This time her heart goes with her vows.'

"The freezing feeling inside me became acute pain.

"'This time her heart goes with her vows.' I tell you those words rang in my ears like a funeral knell. I wondered if they were true. I tried to tell myself that they must be false—but when I saw Kitty's face as she came into the door, I knew that I was wrong and the women were right.

"Kitty's face had never worn that look for me. I sat in the dark corner by the door and watched my wife go up the church, and that freezing feeling in my heart was like the tortures of the lost.

"She looked more of a woman—my girl did—she had grown taller, and it seemed to me that she carried herself with a kind of pride, as if she was going to a triumph. Her eyes shone like two stars; the blue in them called to my mind the blue of the summer sea. There was a smile on her lips—a smile of such love and happiness as made me feel like laying my head down on the seat and sobbing my heart out.

"She didn't wear shining white this time. Her gown was grey, and all soft and flowing. It set off her gracefulness, and made you see more plainly the blue of her eyes, and the pink colour that came and went in her cheeks.

"The sunlight came through the windows in purple splashes and fell across her dress, the same as it had fallen on our wedding day, and one sunbeam struck on her hair, and turned it to gold.

"And I sat there stock still, watching, watching, watching.

"I saw her stop by the step, and Dick Lane moved down beside her, and took her hand. I could have screamed to him to

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drop it—to give her up to me—but that band of ice round my heart kept me silent—I only looked, and looked, and looked.

"Then the parson began to speak, but I never heard a word of what he said, till he came to the words that went into my brain, and seared it like a red-hot iron.

"'Therefore, if any man can show any just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.'

"He said those words very slowly, and he stopped after he had spoken them, as though he were waiting to see if anybody *would* speak. And I clutched at the seat, and the thoughts that went through my mind seemed like the thoughts of months instead of only those few seconds.

"'Let him now speak, or else for ever hereafter hold his peace.'

"'Speak now—speak now,' a voice kept saying in my heart, 'speak straight out, and you'll get your wife again, and your home, and everything you care about on this earth. She is yours by every law of God and man.'

"I opened my lips to speak those words, but they would not come. I thought of Kitty, as she had been seven years ago, and I thought of what she would look like if I said those words that must bring her back to me. I tell you I seemed to see the colour fade out of her face and the happiness die out of her eyes, and the words I had heard the woman say flashed before me.

"'This time her heart goes with her vows.' If I spoke out now—I should break my girl's heart!

"'Or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.'

"'Hold thy peace—hold thy peace.' Some voice seemed to take up those words and swing them to and fro in my brain till I could hear nothing else.

"And the band of ice inside me snapped, and a fever of love and longing for Kitty ran through my veins instead, till I felt like rushing from my place, and going up the church to claim her as my own."

His voice had worked up into rapid, excited tones. All at once he became very quiet.

"It's queer how the big crisis of your life slips by, and you hardly know it's gone. I didn't move out of my place—I never uttered a sound. I said to myself, very fast and low, 'Keep still, you blithering fool. Hold your peace, and let your girl find happiness.' I wasn't going to break my darling's heart for anything in this wide earth, but I tell you it took some gripping of that seat to keep me quiet. My hands were torn and bleeding afterwards.

"'Else hereafter for ever hold thy peace.' The echo of those words still rang round my brain, when I heard the parson's voice begin again, and I knew that what I'd done, I'd done for good and all.

"I didn't know then whether I'd acted rightly. I don't know now. I just dropped down into the seat when the parson said very loud and clear:

"'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder'—and then, because I couldn't bear any more, I got up and stumbled out of the church.

"It was all tramping for me for many a day afterwards. I'd made up my mind that nothing should ever take me back to the village again. They thought I was dead—I would be dead to them. I've not told you their right names—there's no tracing either me or them. I shall never trouble their lives any more—never any more.

"I don't want any one to judge me for what I did. Maybe I was right, maybe I was wrong. God knows. But whether right or wrong, I've kept to those words faithfully. 'Else hereafter for ever hold thy peace.'"

None of us said a word as Gentleman Joe finished. Only somebody gulped and choked again—and Big Dan put out his hand and gripped Gentleman Joe's hand hard.

Then we lay there silent, till the great yellow moon dropped over the rim of the plain, and the grey dawn crept out of the east, and day awoke in the country which is so very far away from the green old land that all of us call—Home.

L. G. Moberly.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

November 11.—The year will be rather quiet for those celebrating their birthdays on this date. Better for those in employ and elderly people.

Girls will have some secret enmity working in their love affairs.

The day is good for dealing with landlords, farmers, builders, and those in authority. Don't travel or remove here.

A child born this day will be ambitious, thoughful, and persevering; fond of change, and will do best in the employ of others.

November 12.— A favourable year for business and money.

Be prepared for strong competition in business.

Young girls will need some caution and prudence with opposite sex, especially with married men and those not free to marry.

The day is good for buying and selling; defer asking favours.

A child born here will be fortunate in most things. The mind will be cheerful, active, and capable.

November 13.— The year will bring much anxiety and worry in business and general affairs to those whose birthdays fall to-day. Beware of accident and fire; give extra care to the health.

Girls born between 8 and 9 a.m. meet with disappointment in love matters.

The day is one on which to keep quiet and let others make the first move. Guard against mishap from 2 to 4 p.m.

A child born here will be fond of travel, and always unsettled.

November 14.— An unfavourable birthday. Do not speculate, and be cautious with writing and agreements.

Girls must beware of deceit from opposite sex.

The day is evil for speculation, writing letters, and doing business with young people.

A child born to-day will be careless, and a bit deceitful. Will not be fortunate in life.

November 15.—A mixed year, many ups and downs; sickness and bereavement may be expected in the family circle.

Girls meet with a lot of anxiety in love affairs. If born near 9 a.m. any engagement may be broken.

The day is good for dealing with land and houses; visit doctors, chemists, or military men. Evil for marriage and pleasure.

A child born here will be active, ambitious and daring, but will meet with many obstacles all through life.

November 16.— A good year is promised.

Favourable for new enterprises and changing residence.

Girls will find love affairs rather quiet.

A child born this day will be fortunate in most matters. The mind will be steady, penetrating and ingenious.

November 17.— Go quietly, for misfortune and loss are threatened. Insure against fire and accident.

Girls born between 2 and 3 p.m or near 10 a.m. will need much care in love affairs.

The day is evil for buying, selling, signing papers and travelling.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate in life; improvident, irritable, moody, and unsettled.

Asturel.

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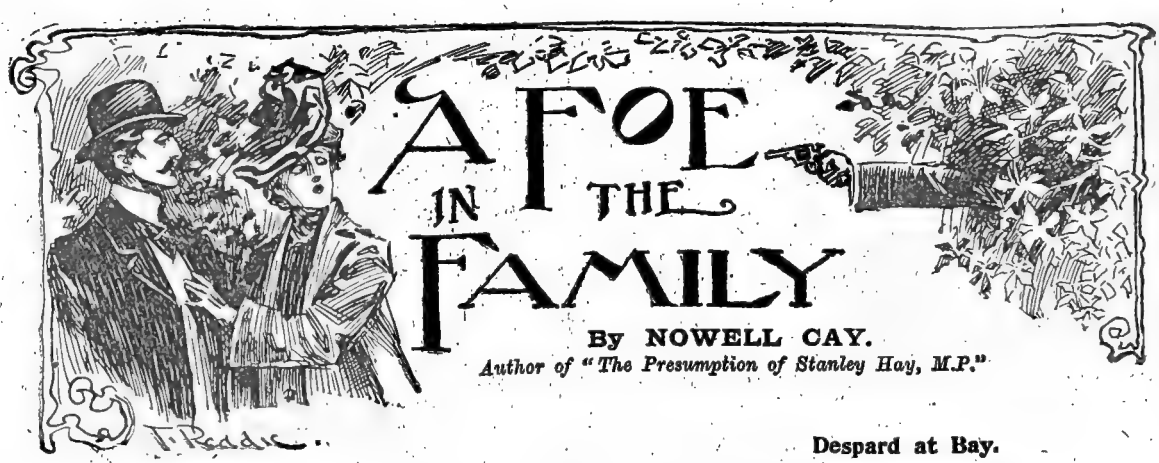

A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Plot to be Frustrated.

GEORGE ILDEN, Baron, of Ilden Castle, while staying with his uncle Jasper, at Pennybrook Hall, suddenly discovers that several suspicious events which have taken place during his stay at the Hall, point to the existence of a plot against his life. He has been shot at, poison has been placed in his pocket-flask, and other attempts, fortunately futile, have been made on his life. He confides in Cathie Hay, his cousin, and they agree that as many members of his own family would materially benefit by his death, the attempts must have their origin in that direction. They suspect Percival, Ilden's cousin. Ilden asks Cathie to marry him, as a means of circumventing his enemies' designs, but she has to refuse.

At about this time he meets Florence Courthorpe, the sister of an old college chum who was drowned while boating. She is very poor, and has taken a situation as governess at Witterby, a village not far from Pennybrook. In seeking to escape his foe, Ilden inadvertently settles down just opposite Florence's temporary home.

Late one night Florence sees a man attempt to enter Ilden's bedroom window with evident criminal designs. She leaves the house clad only in dressing-gown and warns Ilden of his danger. For this exploit her employer dismisses her.

She now has no home, so next day leaves Witterby to stay with some friends at Lallerton. Ilden accompanies her. Arrived at Lallerton, however, they discover that Florence's friends, the Despards, have left suddenly, and no trace of them can be found. Florence, of course, is greatly distressed.

Ilden, however, feeling that he is responsible for her position, and desiring to baulk his enemy, proposes to her, is accepted, and marries her secretly. An announcement in the papers informs his family of the wedding.

Shortly after their marriage Ilden receives a message urging him to return to Pennybrook, his uncle Rupert being dangerously ill. Leaving his wife at the apartments he has taken in London, Ilden leaves for Pennybrook. He is met at the Hall by Cathie, who informs him that his uncle is dead, and that he is again exposing his life to danger.

Cathie informs him of her belief that Guy Despard is in the plot, and insinuates that his own wife, being a friend of the Despards, is possibly implicated.

That night her fears for his safety are shown to be well founded. For in the middle of the night the alarm bell is violently rung, and as Ilden opens his door to ascertain the cause, an attempt is made to stab him. Ilden immediately gives chase to his would-be murderer, and, catching him, throws him down, and is half-strangling him when Grant appears with a light, the rays of which show Ilden's captive to be none other than his cousin Percival.

(The above is a short synopsis of the opening chapters.)

Despard at Bay.

GRANT was gripping his shoulder.

"What the dickens are you doing, Ilden? You are killing him."

George glanced round to where a huge clasp knife still stuck in the woodwork of the door.

"As he deserves to be killed," he said, rising to his feet. "That knife was meant for me, and it makes the sixth try that the scoundrel has had at my life. I have tried to believe that it could not be you," he went on, addressing Percival, who still lay on the floor gasping and breathless. "I knew that you have always been jealous of me, and have never lost an opportunity of doing me a bad turn, but I could not believe in my heart that an Ilden could stoop to murder. But there's no disbelieving it now."

Percival rose sulkily to his feet.

"Don't be a fool, Ilden," he said impatiently, "of course I shouldn't stoop to murder. I thought that it was Despard."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"Despard? And why should you think that Despard was coming out of my room?"

"Because I saw him getting in at your window. How the dickens was I to think that it was you taking five minutes to unlock your door as if you were afraid of making a sound and opening it like a thief—and with the alarm bell ringing all the time. I had not a moment's doubt that it was the thief himself, and that if I did not have the first blow he would."

His voice, even to Ilden's prejudiced ear, had the ring of sincerity, and once more a feeling of physical sickness oppressed him. It was bad enough to believe that his own cousin had tried to murder him. It was almost worse to think that he had suspected and accused him without a cause.

Instinctively he struggled against the idea.

"You say you saw Despard getting in at my window? Why did you not warn me?" he asked, his tone still incredulous.

"I was just going to when I heard him, as I thought, at the door. I was roused by the bell, and looking out of my window saw a ladder raised against your window, and a man whom I took to be Despard going up. I ran down to warn you——"

Grant interrupted him.

"The man must be in the room now, unless he has got away while we're wasting time here. If the ladder is there, Ilden, you can't but believe what Percy says."

George nodded.

"Yes, if the man is there, I will offer you my apologies, cousin Percival."

He was turning to the half-open door as he spoke, but Catherine, who had stood by silent and perturbed, caught at his arm.

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"Not you," she whispered. "It is you that he wishes to injure."

Grant caught the words, and his handsome face darkened.

"I'll go first," he said—"I do not matter."

Percival was hanging back, evidently nervous.

Cathie flushed.

"Of course you matter. It will be better for me to go."

As a matter of fact the three pushed in together, Percival following them cautiously.

"I left the window closed," said Ilden. It was wide open now. The sash must have been thrown up during the struggle in the corridor, for no sound had been heard from the room as they talked together.

Ilden was striding across. There was no ladder raised to the sill, but as he looked down he could see two or three men struggling with it down below. They were some of the outdoor servants, who, roused by the bell, had caught sight of the ladder raised against the house, and were moving it away to cut off the supposed burglar's retreat.

The head-gardener called up an explanation when he saw heads at the open window.

Ilden turned to the room.

"Then the fellow must be in here. Will you lock the door Percy."

Lady Mary Hay, with one or two frightened servants, was entering as he spoke. They had been wandering over the house, asking each other what had happened and been attracted by the sound of voices.

"I think that you had better stay outside, Aunt Mary, and take Cathie with you," said Ilden. "If there is a man in the house he must be hiding in this room, and we have to hunt him out. I wish that you would go and stop that bell, Wardle. We don't want the whole neighbourhood here to help us with one man. We are three men to one here as it is."

In his own mind he was very doubtful whether they had even the one man to deal with. His suspicion against Percival was strong still. He noticed that his cousin was fully dressed, although he claimed to have been roused from sleep by the bell. It seemed to him as likely as not that he had placed the ladder against the house himself as an excuse for his attack, and when Catherine showed herself reluctant to accompany her mother, he raised no objection. She, Percival and Grant alone remained with him when he had locked the door to commence their search of the room.

Grant was already drawing aside curtains and throwing open wardrobe doors. Ilden was watching Percival who had seemed in two minds whether to retreat with Lady Mary and the servant-women. Percival made no pretence of searching, although his eyes followed Grant's movements with a nervous anticipation which George was inclined to put down to his certainty that the search would leave his story uncorroborated.

He was on the point of accusing him of having placed the ladder in position himself when an excited cry from Catherine made him turn quickly to find the search ended.

Drawing aside a curtain that hung before a recess near the window, Grant had revealed the figure of a man crouched back against the wall, a figure which Ilden recognised instantly.

Guy Despard had evidently been hoping to the last to avoid detection. His white, twitching face and strained eyes gave signs of the ordeal of suspense through which he had passed. He seemed a poor cowed creature as the light fell on his crouching figure.

But as Grant's exclamation and Catherine's cry showed that he was discovered, his face changed, and instead of fear came the fierceness of despair.

He pushed aside the curtain himself to spring out into the room, and Catherine uttered another cry as she realised that he had a revolver in his hand and was levelling it at Ilden. For a moment it was directed straight for his breast, the next Grant had struck it out of his hand, and with another blow which raised the poet not a little in his cousin's esteem, had sent the would-be murderer reeling back against the wall. Before he could recover himself the three were upon him, holding him down.

Not that much force was necessary. Grant's well-aimed blow from the shoulder seemed to have left him dazed and helpless. George ran his hand over his clothes.

"The fellow has no other weapon," he said, picking up the revolver. "There is no need to hold him. I have to thank you, Cousin Grant, for the way you tackled him. A moment more and he would have had a shot at me."

"It was splendid," broke in Catherine. "Grant, I admire you."

The poet flushed.

"It was nothing," he said, "but I think Ilden owes Percy an apology now for what he said outside."

George did not need the reminder. He was realising keenly that the apology was demanded. The discovery of Despard had left him without a single tangible excuse for the accusation he had made. In a sudden revulsion of feeling he had asked himself whether his suspicion itself had not been absurd and unjust.

Percival, it was true, had more than once tried to get out of some scrape or other by saddling him with the responsibility for it, but that was a different thing from plotting against his life, and he made his apology almost sincerely.

The three men were standing now at a little distance from their prisoner, who leant back against the wall glaring at Ilden like an animal at bay. The idea that the man was not wholly sane recurred to the latter's mind as he met his ferocious glance, which could not have been more hostile if he had been his greatest enemy.

"Well, the question is," said Grant, "what are we going to do with our friend now that we have got him? It is not worth while taking him over to Wentworth Gaol to-night. I propose that we lock him up in the cellar or somewhere, and get back to bed. I suppose Uncle Jasper will prosecute."

"Yes, let us get the fellow locked up and Uncle Jasper can decide what to do with him to-morrow," put in Percival, who, after his cousin's apology, still seemed nervous and ill at ease.

Something of eagerness in his manner tended to revive Ilden's suspicion against him, momentarily laid aside.

"It strikes me that it is more my business than Uncle Jasper's," he said. "And I should like to cross-examine the fellow, if he will talk."

"What is the good?" said Percival. "He will only make up some cock-and-bull story to try and hide the fact that he meant to rob you."

"I think that it is Uncle's affair," said Grant, and was surprised when the prisoner, who had stood till now absolutely silent, answered for himself.

"Lord Ilden is aware that it is a matter between himself and me. If he were not a coward he would settle it with me alone, without asking you to protect him."

George smiled.

"Possibly I might, if I had the slightest idea what the matter is; but I am glad you can speak for yourself. If you are sensible enough to tell me what I want to know, it is possible that I shall let you go. You came here with the direct intention of taking my life, I believe."

"Yes, and I will kill you yet, Lord Ilden, if

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I have to follow you to the end of the earth before I succeed."

"Well, that is straightforward, at any rate," said Ilden. "I may take it, may I not, that you fired a shot at me from behind a hedge at Ilden Castle nearly six weeks ago?"

"Yes."

"And another at Kirby when I was out shooting."

"Yes."

"Well, that is honest. You also had a try at me here in the fir coppice a fortnight ago, and the next morning tried to poison my pocket-flask."

"Yes."

"May I take it that it was you also who waited outside my room at Witterby intending to shoot me, if I had not luckily been warned?"

"Yes; you have an infernal luck."

"You are a poor shot, you mean, and have less pluck than ingenuity. You see, I think, Grant, that this is more my matter than Uncle Jasper's."

Grant was listening to the long list of attempts with evident satisfaction, and it seemed to Ilden, too, that Percival was affected by it.

"But, if the man has been tracking you like this, why on earth have you not had him arrested long ago?" cried Grant.

"Because I did not remotely guess till this evening who my assailant was. Now that I have discovered him, you can understand my curiosity to know what his motive is."

"You know well enough, Lord Ilden, why you have deserved death at my hands," said the prisoner fiercely.

"I am hanged if I do."

"Then you do not know my name?"

"Pardon me. I understand that it is Mr. Guy Despard. Lady Ilden informed me of the fact a fortnight ago after I had seen her travelling with you from Pennybrook to Rickerby. But what your name can have to do with it I can't conceive. To the best of my knowledge I never heard it before my wife told me about you. I have some inquiries from her to make about your sister, her friend. But that can wait. What I want to get at——"

Percival interrupted him.

"What is the use of talking to him? The fellow is evidently mad."

"I am hoping that he is sane enough to make a bargain," said Ilden. "Look here, Mr. Despard. I have no feeling of resentment against you, any more than you can have any real resentment against me. One cannot feel resentment against a person one does not know. But I mean to get at the motive of these attempts on my life. If you are willing to help me, I will overlook what you have done, and let you go. I'll do more. If you will tell me who has employed you to take my life, I will see that you do not lose money by changing sides. If you don't, of course, I shall prosecute you. I am not vindictive, but I have to protect myself, and if you do not choose to give me the names of your accomplices, and disown them, I will take care that you are kept out of the way as long as the law can keep you—twenty years, I should guess. I'd prefer to scotch your principal, but if you prefer to shield him, I'll take good care that he shall lose the services of his agent. Come now, who has paid you to attempt my life?"

MR. DESPARD.

An expression of troubled bewilderment was stealing over the wild, desperate face of the man at bay.

"You know that nobody has paid me," he said sullenly. "You know what there is between you and me, Lord Ilden, and that only your scoundrelly life can satisfy my claim."

"Come, the man is mad," said Percival impatiently again, and reminded his cousin that some slight connection at least existed between the two.

"Does the satisfaction of this claim, whatever it may be, demand that you shall murder my cousin, Mr. Ilden, as well as myself?" he said with a glance at Percival. "He tells me that you have been following him about too."

Percival's eyes shifted uneasily under the prisoner's gaze.

"I have never seen your cousin. I have never heard his name," said Despard.

"Well, he knows yours, and seems more afraid of you than I have ever thought of being," said George, angry with his cousin for not admitting openly what his knowledge of the man really amounted to, and the bewildered look on the prisoner's face became more marked. Percival was ghastly.

"I suppose you think, Ilden, that I have put the man on your track to get into your shoes?" he said sharply. "Why don't you ask him outright? Or I will if you are afraid of putting your hints into honest words. Tell Lord Ilden, Despard, or whatever your name is, whether I have paid you to take his life. You need not be afraid to say it—he will pay you more than I could ever offer you."

George interrupted him.

"I have already apologised for my suspicion, Percy. You are not the only person who would benefit by my death. And if you would only help me by telling me what you really know of Despard, I might discover which of them is employing this fellow. I suspect that it is some money-lender who has risked too much for Uncle Jasper's reversions. Come now, you told me you thought he was a dun—who did you imagine was employing him?"

"I tell you I know nothing at all about him," said Percival angrily.

"But you knew his name. How did you learn that?"

"I asked Potter at the inn what the name of his guest was."

Percival's known partiality for the society of the village inn made the explanation a sufficiently satisfactory one, and George was surprised when the prisoner took the trouble to contradict it.

"That is not true. Nobody here knows my name," he said with an excitement that seemed to Ilden uncalled for, and he noticed that the furtive glances he gave his cousin showed now almost as much animosity as those directed against himself.

Percival had met the contradiction with a shrug of his shoulders and repeated his favourite assertion that the man was mad.

"Well, I don't see what you gain by this talk," Grant broke in. "If the fellow has accomplices, it is evident that he does not mean to give them away, and if you are not cold, Ilden, we are. Catherine will catch her death while you and Percy wrangle. I think myself that Percy is right. The fellow is simply a dangerous maniac, and ought to be dealt with by a magistrate—if you can really think of no possible grudge that he could have against you."

The tone was dubious enough to make Ilden answer emphatically:

"I swear that I never remotely heard of the man till a fortnight ago, after he had begun to follow me. But he does not seem inclined to win his freedom by telling me what I want to know, so there is nothing to do but lock him up. I am sorry I forgot how cold you must be, Cathie. I'll have another try at the fellow to-morrow."

A peremptory knock sounded at the locked door as he spoke, and Grant put an end to the informal examination by throwing it open to admit the Honourable Jasper, followed by

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practically all the occupants of the house, including the housemaid, who, happening to look out of her window in the night, had first caught sight of the man with the ladder and flown to the alarm bell to rouse the house.

Its master had at last with difficulty been awakened and made to understand that a dangerous housebreaker was in the place, and his arrival put an end to the suspense of the wondering crowd, which had waited outside the locked door trying to guess what was passing within.

The Honourable Jasper, himself a magistrate, was for dealing out condign and immediate punishment to the offender, but permitted himself to be persuaded to have him locked up until morning, which would find him in a more magisterial state of mind.

A crowd accompanied the unresisting prisoner to one of the empty wine cellars, which, with only a little grating in place of a window and a strongly-bolted oaken door, made a secure enough prison for the night.

George saw him locked up somewhat regretfully.

"If I could only make him speak out," he said to Catherine.

"*You* do not think that he is mad?" she asked, and George shook his head. After all his efforts to understand and meet a supposed plot he could not accept the idea that after all he made the object of a maniac's motiveless enmity.

"In the morning I think I shall persuade him to admit that there has been method in his madness," he said confidently.

The Bird has Flown!

THE clocks in the house were striking two as Ilden went back to his room, very well content with the night's work.

His idea that the actual attempts on his life were all the work of one man had been confirmed, and the man himself was safe under lock and key. It was true that a great deal of mystery remained. He had many things left to discover, including the identity of the prime mover of the plot, and the nature of the connection which certainly existed between his cousin Percival and the prisoner. The more he recalled what had passed the more puzzled he became. Despard's denial of all knowledge of his cousin had seemed sincere, and yet it was certain that Percival knew more of the prisoner than he would admit. Given that his explanation of the attack in the corridor was a truthful one, he must surely have been in a strange state of nervous panic to meet even a presumed burglar with a blow at the heart before he discovered whether he was even armed.

Yes, there was plenty of mystery to be cleared up, but Ilden looked forward hopefully to its elucidation.

If Despard were sane he must surely realise that he could gain nothing by silence. He would see him without the disturbing presence of his cousin, and it would be strange if he could not induce him to talk. Morning would probably see him in possession of the whole plot, and he could return to Florence with the news that their danger was at an end and that she could take up her position at Ilden Castle as its mistress. The prospect was not without its charm, although his conscience busied itself again asking whether the charm would last.

If Despard were proved to be an irresponsible madman, well, the plot would trouble them no more, because he would know that it had never existed. He deliberately closed his mind against an explanation that would render all his conjecture and planning ridiculous, and leave his marriage itself unjustified by necessity.

No; Guy Despard knew what he was doing, and had a sufficient motive. In the morning he would discover what it was. All his restless thoughts turned to the coming examination of the prisoner in the wine-cellar.

At the first streak of dawn he rose and dressed. He would get the business over and settled before any of the others were down.

Inside the house all was silent, as he made his way downstairs; but, going round to the stables, he found, as he expected, that some of the men were up and about, and he selected one of them—a young giant of a groom, with the physique of a prize-fighter—to return to the house with him. It was just as well to take every precaution.

"I am going down to have a talk with our friend, the housebreaker," he said. "I should like you to mount guard outside in case he makes any attempt at escape. You can bring a stick with you, although, as I am armed and he is not, I do not suppose there will be any need for your services."

The young man's face brightened at the commission.

"I wanted to follow him up the ladder last night, my lord," he said, "but Sanders would not hear of it. He thought it would be better to take the ladder away, and catch him inside."

"Well, I fancy it was lucky for our friend in the cellar that they did not let you get at him," said Ilden, smiling at the lust for battle that showed itself in the young giant's face. "Step lightly, there is no need for us to disturb anybody."

They were entering the house as he spoke, and made their way down to the cellar in silence. Ilden was busy arranging the arguments with which he would persuade the prisoner to make full confession. He did not speak until they had reached the solid oaken door of the temporary cell, secured by its huge outside bolts.

"You can wait here on guard," he said, as he drew them back. "I will call you if there is the slightest need."

He smiled again at the groom's eager face. Tobbitt was evidently hoping that the prisoner would prove violent.

The wine-cellar, lighted only by its tiny grating, was still in complete darkness, and Ilden struck a match as he entered, regretting that he had not brought a candle or lamp with him.

Then as the little flame flared up he stared round the bare chamber in blank dismay. The place was empty.

He struck another match to make absolutely sure of the fact, and strode out moodily to where Tobbitt, with his cudgel in position, awaited him with questioning eyes.

"The man's gone," he said without emotion. The only emotion of which he was conscious—and after the first moment of realisation it was certainly not surprise—was one which he could not show to a servant.

Tobbitt was dumfounded.

"Gone! But, my lord," he gasped, "he can't have got through that grating, and we found the bolts all right."

"Which looks, doesn't it, as though he has had a friend to assist him," said Ilden with a queer little laugh. "You need not tell anybody what has taken place—or stay, it is bound to be known, so you can say what you like. While you are here we may as well see whether all the doors and windows are secure."

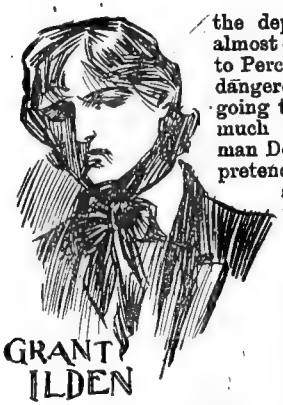
He made a tour of the house perfunctorily, the groom following, to find every means of egress from the house apparently untouched.

"He must be hiding in the house, my lord," said Tobbitt.

"Or he has a friend inside who has taken the trouble to relock the door after him," said Ilden, with his puzzling tone of indifference.

The end of their tour of inspection found the household awaking. Some of the servants were coming down, and Ilden spread consternation among them by sending up a message to his uncle to tell him what had happened.

Then after dispatching Tobbitt to the station to watch



the departure of the first train, almost due to start, he strode upstairs to Percival's room with set lips and a dangerous light in his eyes. He was going to find out now or never how much his cousin knew about this man Despard. Percival made a bad pretence of being roused from sleep as Ilden entered his bedroom unceremoniously.

"What's the row?" he asked with a yawn.

"You have let Despard loose. That is all," said George.

Percival raised himself on an elbow.

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I mean that Despard has gone, and that he has been let out by somebody who is still in the house. That 'somebody' is yourself, and you can't deny it."

His cousin replied with a fine show of indignation.

"Look here, Ilden. I have put up with a good deal from you. But you are going too far. I am not going to quarrel with you, or have a family wrangle, while my father is lying dead in the house. You seem to think that it is a good opportunity to attack me. You know that I can do nothing until the poor Governor is put under the ground. But after that we will have a settlement. You shall see whether you can make any vile charge against me that comes to your lips. The last thing that the Governor asked me was that I would try and be good friends with you and I meant to do my best for his sake. But if you make it impossible, I am not to blame. But I shall respect his wishes while he is above ground. Say what you like. I shall not strike you back."

In spite of his suspicion that the man was protecting himself by an infamous hypocrisy, Ilden felt shamed. In the excitement of the last few hours he had practically forgotten his uncle, and he was touched on his tenderest point. He had shown himself wanting in respect to the dead and to the family honour.

"Very well," he said coldly, "we will postpone our understanding until the day after to-morrow. But I should like you to understand that if Despard attempts my life in the meanwhile, it may go hard with you. There are others beside myself who know that you are better acquainted with him than you are willing to admit, and the man who set him free this morning makes himself an accessory to any crime he may commit."

Percival made no reply. His resigned silence was a reproach, and George turned away with a shrug.

"All right. Our reckoning can wait, but it will be just as well for us not to meet again till we are ready for it. *You* cannot leave the house, so I shall. You will not see me again till the funeral at Mordenhale."

The escape of Despard had exhausted his patience, and he would have left the house without a good-bye to anybody, if Catherine had not managed to waylay him as he started.

And Catherine only made him feel angry. She could not disguise the fact that the capture of Despard had increased her suspicion against Florence, and it made her anxious to think that George was returning to his wife.

"You need not alarm yourself," he said, "I care too much for my wife's safety to return to her yet, and give our enemies the chance of discovering her whereabouts."

The fact that she found it more difficult now to suspect Percival made her sympathy of less account to him than ever, and although she insisted on accompanying him to the station again in dread that Despard might be lying in wait for him somewhere on the way. they had little to say to one another.

An infinite space of time seemed to divide him from the time when she had been his only confidante, and he told her his plans, such as they were, almost reluctantly. For the present he was going to the Castle where he would stay until his uncle's funeral, at which he was still determined to be present.

His tone prevented her even attempting to dissuade him.

"After the funeral," he went on, "Percival shall tell me plainly what he really knows about Guy Despard, or admit himself his accomplice. In the latter case, I shall put the matter into the hands of a detective while I take my wife abroad. I have kept the matter in my own hands so far for the sake of the family honour. I could not have all my father's relatives suspected and watched without a single tangible piece of evidence against one of them; but we have got something to work on now. I want Despard's antecedents looked up, and, if Percy does not choose to render it unnecessary, his dealings with my cousin. He has put himself out of the pale of consideration by this night's work."

"But supposing that Percival did not let the man out?" suggested Catherine.

But George was in no mood to debate his cousin's guilt. His mind was made up, and he would not let it revert to the old uncertainty.

Ilden was leaving the Hall, as he had come, on foot. It seemed safer than to expose himself in a carriage, if, as was probable, Despard was lurking in the neighbourhood to make another attempt on his life.

Catherine was full of nervous apprehension, and started at every sound.

"It is horrible to think that you are in just as much danger as ever," she said. "Last night I told myself that it was all over; and, after all, we have gained nothing. You are just where you were before."

"Not exactly. It is a great thing to know who my actual assailant is; and Despard cannot follow me openly. He knows that I shall have him arrested if I catch sight of him; and the fact that he is known will make him afraid to attempt my life again. If I am shot now, everybody will know who has done it. Before, he had only to avoid being caught in the act, and nobody would have thought of suspecting him. The game has become too dangerous for him."

"But he did not seem to me a man who cared whether he was caught or not, so long as he killed you," said Cathie. "And he did not seem a bit like a paid assassin. He seemed full of personal hatred against you. Are you quite sure that you have not injured him in some indirect way, perhaps through somebody that he loves. Grant says that if the man is sane, it is the only explanation of his attitude."

Ilden laughed sharply.

"The way in which we dear cousins suspect one another is delightful. I might have guessed that it was my turn, and that the person finally responsible for these attempts on my life would be made out to be myself. And who does dear Grant imagine would take the trouble to set the fellow free."

Cathie coloured.

"Of course he is absurd," she said, "but he thinks you set him free yourself to prevent him making his story public."

They reached the station as she spoke, and George was not sorry to find their *tête-à-tête* put an end to.

"She half believes it," he said to himself. "Thank goodness my wife has a little faith in me, or I should be left without anybody to believe in me."

Which was no doubt unjust to Catherine, who was in a panic lest Despard should be lying in wait about the station.

But the train came in and started again without any sign of the surreptitious attack which Catherine was half-expecting.

"No such luck," said Ilden to himself. "The fellow will not give us another chance of capturing him."

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He had given Catherine the impression that he was returning direct to the Castle, but he had other plans of which he had not spoken to her, since it would entail his telling too much about his marriage, and giving details which could only increase his cousin's suspicion of his wife.

At Shipton Gate he left the train, and set out for Lallerton, feeling that at last he had a starting point from which to begin investigations.

The game had changed, he told himself, as he made his way on foot to the pretty village which at every turn brought back some pleasing recollection of his wife.

He went first to the cottage where Clara Wimple, the former servant of the Despards had been living. With the new light which had come to him with the detection of Despard, it had seemed to him probable that he would find in the girl his mysterious friend of the Lallerton country-road. Living as she had done in the Despard's house, she was the most likely person to have heard that his life was in danger from the brother of her mistress, and he was disappointed on calling at the cottage to find nobody there to answer his knock. He waited there until it became quite apparent that the cottage was quite deserted, and then returned to the inn where he had stayed with Florence to make inquiries. If anything had been learnt in the village about the Despards during his absence he would be sure to hear it at the inn, and he made his way across the green, framing questions for the garrulous landlady.

Here there was to be no disappointment for him.

"Now this is strange, sir," she said, "if you had only come in an hour earlier you would have saved me sending a letter."

"A letter? To whom?"

"To yourself, sir—or rather to your wife. I posted it less than an hour ago."

His mind leapt quickly to connect the rather surprising announcement with his quest.

"You have learnt something then about the people for whom I was making inquiries," he said, "Mr. and Miss Despard?"

The landlady looked surprised.

"I have seen Mr. Despard since you were here. But I did not know you would like me to write and tell you about it. He was here early this morning."

Here was more exciting news than George had expected, and his evident interest made the good lady enter well-pleased into details.

It seemed that quite early, before the tavern was actually open, and before any morning train had arrived at Shipton Gate, Mr. Despard had presented himself, looking weary and dishevelled, as if he had been up all night. He had ordered breakfast and eaten it ravenously, after which he had hired the pony-trap to drive to the neighbouring village of Castledale. The landlord himself had driven him, and had not yet returned.

"As likely as not he has driven round by way of Shipton Gate and put the gentleman down at the station there," she said. "But even if he has done that he ought to have been home before this. It is more than three hours since they started."

"And how far is this Castledale?" asked Ilden, debating mentally whether it would be better to start there at once in pursuit, or wait for the arrival of the landlord with news that might make the pursuit to the next village unnecessary.

The distance to Castledale was less than three miles, it appeared.

"Do you know whether Mr. Despard has friends there?" he asked, and the landlady shook her head.

"I have never heard of his having any friends, or Miss Despard either, except Mrs. George."

Ilden started at the name. It was that under which he and his wife had hidden their identity at Sydenham!

(Further developments of the plot are recorded next Tuesday.)

Your Editor Chats.

By the time you have read this number you will no doubt have formed an opinion as to the merits of the new series of articles by Lady Peggy Carstairs, and you will be doing your Editor a great favour if you will drop a post-card and let him know whether you like "How I Chaperoned Belinda" or not.

In reference to the previous series which has just closed H. P. M. writes:

"I have been intensely interested in 'The Confessions of Cynthia,' more especially in that part which dealt with the attempt of the society doctor to blackmail Mrs. Norton, and in the manner in which this woman's crime was hushed up. I have never seen this sort of thing exposed before, and no doubt it will read to a good many people as rather overdrawn. I have been behind the scenes for many years now, and I have come across many a case of almost the same sort in which a wealthy and prominent society person has committed a crime which money has been able to smooth over. There are to-day scores of society doctors who are in possession of secrets that would bring many prominent members of society into the police courts. Many of these doctors are prompted by professional etiquette to say nothing about the matters; others, ess scrupulous, find the knowledge a fine source of income to them by blackmailing the principals. I think it is very courageous of you to expose these things, and I look with interest for further revelations in the new series."

And I don't think that H. P. M. will be disappointed. I know for a fact that many of the statements made in the last series were looked upon by readers as fiction, simply because they were so startling as to be almost impossible to believe. Yet the articles were a clear and true description of the way in which the members of the "smart set" pass their existence, and the new series in equally correct. In the one case, Society was seen through the eyes of a young guileless girl, and in the other, it is seen through the eyes of a middle-aged woman of the world.

I AM delighted to hear from so many hundreds of readers that the new serial story is so much appreciated. I wish to thank most heartily all those who have troubled to write me in the matter.

YOU will find on another page a picture of Miss Madge Morris's wedding cake. It is very beautiful, is it not? And I am sure that it will prove good eating. The dainty ornament on the top is all white and silver, and is fit to grace any parlour window. With it, of course, will be sent a piece of wedding cake. It is not many prizes that are supposed to bring good luck; there are none which can bring greater luck than a piece of wedding cake, and the 101 readers who are fortunate enough to secure a piece of that sent by Miss Madge Morris will be particularly fortunate, and ought to have a happy year.

Your Editor.

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His was the Power.

"ARE you a Tsar that you conduct yourself thus autocratically?" demanded the girl as her father tossed her young man into the street. "No," rejoined the old man, "I am simply the power behind the thrown."

He was the Beast.

SHE: "This fur rug is very beautiful; to what beast does it belong?" He (candidly): "To me."

Her Point of View.

TOM: "Have you read 'Two Men and a Girl'? What do you think of it?" Kitty: "No; but I think the girl must have had a good time."

The Candid Friend.

ALICE (looking at her portrait): "Don't you think that Van Brush has managed to make a rather pretty picture of me?" Edith: "Yes, he really has; what a remarkably clever artist he is!"

Gave the Game Away.

TOMMY: "Mr. Yabsley, sister Laura said at the table this morning that she thought you had the prettiest moustache she ever saw." Yabsley: "You oughtn't to tell things you hear at the table, Tommy." Tommy: "But she's going to give me sixpence for telling you."

Cautious Parents.

"WHY did Barlow and his wife go abroad on different steamers? Quarrel?" "No. Mrs. Barlow thought it would be pleasanter for the children. Two steamers were not likely to be lost, and if one of them had gone down the children would have had one parent left."

Unreasonable Man.

"BUT, my dear," protested Mr. Young when Mrs. Young showed him her purchases for the day, "why have you bought four dozen clothes pins when all the washing is done at the laundry?" "Oh, Harry, how can you be so horrid?" began Mrs. Young tearfully. "Why, they were bargains."

Sis was Unimpressed.

A YOUNG man home from college, wishing to inspire his little sister with awe for his learning, pointed to a star, and said: "Sis, do you see that bright little luminary? It's bigger than this whole world." "No, 't'aint," said Sis. "Yes, it is," declared the young collegian. "Then why don't it keep off the rain?" was the triumphant rejoinder.

Kept His Word.

"I USED to think that you were not a man of your word, Jones, but I've changed my mind." "Ah, you understand me now, friend Smith. But what led you to change your mind?" "You remember that £10 you borrowed from me?" "Yes." "You said if I lent it to you you would be indebted to me for ever." "Yes," "Well, you are keeping your word like a man."

What She Thought and What She Did.

SHE said the men were "horrid" with an energy emphatical, And built upon a very dreadful plan; And when one jarred upon her, with a gesture quite dramatical, She said: "Well, if that isn't like a man!" Until there came a fellow with a proposition practical, That made her cheeks turn very, very red. "You can have me," she said to him, with pout that was attractival, "But—I wish you weren't a horrid man!" she said.

The Religion for Him.

KATE: "No, Hettie does not attend any church; she says she is her own religion." Harry: "That is a religion I should like to embrace."

The Man who Cared.

ETHEL: "Since she has married again, I do not believe that she deplores the death of her first husband at all." Maude: "No, but her second husband does."

The Fall of Man.

MR. STEBBINS: "Statistics go to show that the male proportion of the world is fast falling off." Mrs. Stebbins: "Gracious me! Isn't there some way of tying them on?"

Giving Him Practice.

ASPIRING POET: "I'll set the world ablaze yet." His Wife: "I do hope you will, dear. Would you mind making a fire in the kitchen stove—just as a matter of practice, you know."

Seeing, Yet Not Seeing.

"BUT, Ethel, how do you know that this young man loves you? Has he told you so?" Ethel: "Oh, no, mamma! But if you could only see the way he looks at me when I am not looking at him!"

Found it Economical.

SMITH: "You say you write dunning letters to yourself and sign them with fictitious names. What do you do that for?" Jones: "You see, my wife is always after me for money, and when she reads those letters she becomes discouraged."

A Sweetheart Provided.

LADY OF THE HOUSE (to new girl): "I cannot allow you to keep a follower of your own. There is a corporal who comes to our house every Sunday; he is accustomed to our ways, and all my former servants have had him for a sweetheart; you can have him, too."

Had Caught His Fish.

MRS. NEWLYWED: "You never ask me to go out and have a drive like you did before we were married." Mr. Newlywed: "That's so; but you never see a man running after a 'bus when he has overtaken it, and you never hear of a fisherman giving bait to a fish he has caught."

The Test of Love.

"AND are you sure you love him?" "Am I sure? Do you see this dress?" "Of course I do. What of it?" "Will you kindly tell me if it bears the slightest resemblance to the present styles." "Well, really it—er—it——" "It doesn't," "No." "And I'm wearing it because he likes it."

She Knew Housemaids Too Well.

EDWIN: "What do you think of that artist who painted cobwebs on the ceiling so naturally that his housemaid broke her heart owing to her ceaseless and vain efforts to remove them?" Angelina: "Well, there may have been such an artist, but there surely never was such a housemaid."

Would Run No Risks.

MR. SIMPEL: "Will you be mine, darling?" Miss Strongmind: "You must first ask papa's consent, Harold." Mr. Simpel: "But—but I dread to do it. I am extremely nervous, and, so to speak, so easily sat upon that——" Miss Strongmind (hurriedly): "I'll be yours, Harold! Never mind about papa!"

Why She Was Disappointed.

MISS MABEL (in tearful burst of confidence): "Mamma, I'm so disappointed in Horace! You can't think!" Mamma: "What's the matter now, dear? Have you quarrelled?" Miss Mabel: "No, but when I told him my birthday came on December 25th, he said, 'Dearest, let us be married on that day!' I do believe he was thinking how much money he would save in making presents if all our anniversaries came at Christmas."

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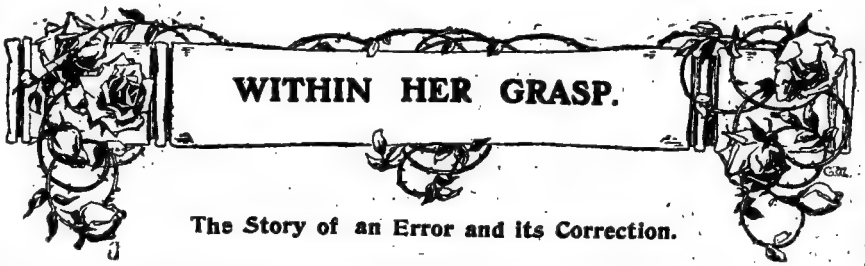

WITHIN HER GRASP.

The Story of an Error and its Correction.

It was the race week at Marlahabad, in India, and a motley crowd thronged the course.

Flower-bedecked hats and delicate coloured gowns contrasted picturesquely with the dusky faces and gorgeous raiment of the native spectators.

Stately Helen Lomax was there with Mrs. Mitford, the collector's wife. As usual, she was surrounded by admirers; but of her two most faithful ones, Mr. Burrell, the Commissioner, and Major Wardrop, only Burrell was by her side.

"I have won on every race, so far," said Winnie Maitland, Mrs. Mitford's niece, a bright-eyed girl of seventeen, just out from Scotland.

"I do hope Major Wardrop will win this, don't you, Helen?"

The girl addressed looked up quickly. She was some years older than Winnie. Those who didn't admire her, called her handsome, in a cold, statuesque way; but those who knew her well understood the warm-hearted, impulsive nature, and could perceive the latent fire which lurked in the dark, dreamy eyes.

"Of course I do," she said quietly.

"I don't believe you really like Major Wardrop," persisted Winnie, "and yet he seems to admire you so," said the girl, a little wistfully, looking up at her companion.

She had, all unknowingly, touched upon a tender spot. For though Helen liked and admired Mr. Burrell, and looked upon him as a real friend, she loved Gerard Wardrop with all the strength of a reserved, passionate nature. No love-making had passed between them, but each had known, through that mysterious telepathy that is independent of speech, how strong was their feeling for each other.

Helen had made the acquaintance of both men whilst her father was stationed last year at Marlahabad, but he had been suddenly moved away a few months previously, and until this week they had not met again. How well she remembered her first introduction to Major Wardrop. It was at a gymkana and she was just going to ride in the ladies' bicycle race, when Mr. Burrell brought him up, saying he was a very old friend of his, and was chumming with him.

After that they had met almost daily. But unexpectedly he had been sent away on duty for a few weeks, and had not even seen her to say "Good-bye."

Would she ever forget how she felt on returning from a picnic at which Major Wardrop had not been present when she was handed a little note from him explaining the reason of his hurried departure, and saying how much he should look forward to their meeting on his return.

During his absence her father had been ordered to a distant station, and thus they had not met since. But so far the meeting had been full of disappointment. She had been at Marlahabad now for ten days, and in all that time she had never been alone with Gerard, although he had eagerly sought her society on all possible occasions. Her hostess was a veritable dragon, and she was beginning to suspect her of preventing any private conversation.

Was it possible that she wanted Winnie to marry him? The little girl seemed quite ready to lose her heart to him, and he was evidently attracted by her youthful prettiness. Here her train of thought was interrupted by a cheery voice behind her saying—

"A penny for your thoughts, Miss Lomax."

She looked up and saw young Teddie Gordon, a boyish, but very staunch admirer.

"Oh, they are worth more than that to me, Teddy, so I'll postpone the recital of them till you make me a better offer."

"Well, I came to ask you if you would like to watch this next race from the water jump. I expect we shall see a few spills, for it's such a big field."

"Oh, I hope not, I am sure," said Helen hastily, as she thought of Gerard, "but I will go if you like. It will be a change from the stand," and she rose from her seat.

Looking back, she noticed that Winnie was, for the moment, alone, and called to her to join them. The girl started up eagerly, and they hurried across to the jump.

"There they are, going to the post," said Teddy.

"Doesn't he sit that chestnut splendidly?"

"I think Mr. Carpenter will win myself, for he rides equally well, and has a splendid mount," said Helen perversely. "I'm afraid you'll lose your gloves, after all, Winnie."

"Now they were off—No, it's a false start! Yes, there they really are off this time. I do think Major Wardrop will win," and Winnie clapped her hands, her pretty blue eyes dancing with excitement.

Nearer and nearer came the horses, they seemed to be all together, would they all clear the jump?

An instant's suspense, and Mr. Carpenter was over, quickly followed by Wardrop on the chestnut. Those two were ahead of all the rest, and it was a neck-and-neck race. Only one more hurdle. Which would win? A sickening crash.

"By Jove! He's down!"

Horror stricken silence fell upon the group. They could not see what had happened at the distant hurdle. Only that Wardrop's horse had swerved, then jumping wildly had fallen heavily. After a short struggle he regained his feet, and went cantering riderless away.

"Oh, he has fallen—is he killed?" and Winnie covered her face with her hands.

Helen tried to reassure her, for though she herself was white to the lips, she was more successful in hiding her anxiety than her younger companion.

"Don't distress yourself, Miss Maitland," said Teddy. "I daresay he's not badly hurt. No, see there he is, walking away. Let's go back to the stand; we shall learn more about him there," he added kindly, for the girl's evident distress touched him. He felt sure from her anxiety that she must care very much for Wardrop, though seeing that he must be at least twenty years her senior, the lad wondered a little at it.

Helen, too, was wondering. Was it only natural dread of seeing suffering that had moved her so, or had the handsome Major awakened a tenderer feeling in her innocent heart?

Presently a sympathetic murmur greeted the appearance of the victim of the accident himself upon the stand. He made his way at once to where Winnie was sitting, feeling a little ashamed of her sudden display of feeling.

"I'm awfully sorry to have lost you the bet, Miss Winnie, and I can't even lay claim to a broken limb to excite your compassion."

"You really gave us a dreadful fright; both Helen and I thought you were killed."

Major Wardrop turned to Helen, who was standing a little behind the others. She flushed slightly as she met his eye, but gave no other sign of discomposure.

She felt reassured of his love for her, and for the time being her doubts and fears vanished. Only, however, to return in full force a few days later.

The Race ball was to take place that evening. Helen was feeling tired and languid, and in preparation for it prolonged her afternoon's rest beyond its usual limits.

However, the desire for tea aroused her at last, and leaving her room she stepped into the verandah to look for Winnie, when she stopped short suddenly. Trembling all over, her

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knees almost gave way under her, for Winnie was there, standing on the step, her hand in Major Wardrop's, a general appearance of happiness in her air.

"I'll do my utmost to make you happy, little one," he was saying, "and to-morrow I shall come and have the dreaded interview with Mrs. Mitford. Mind you keep plenty of dances for me to-night, I shall be obliged to be a little late." And, with a wave of his hand, he jumped into his dog-cart and drove off.

Helen moved mechanically back to her room, and sat down dully conscious that she had received a blow, and would awaken presently from the stunned sensation which mercifully follows a blow, whether it be mental or physical.

The ayah came to dress her for dinner in the filmy pink robe, which she had chosen with such care, that she might look well in his eyes. But she motioned her away. Then Mrs. Mitford came to the door. She must exert herself now to think, to make up her mind to hide the blow, and to appear delighted when she received the news of Winnie's engagement. She opened the door a little way, trusting to the fast fading light to hide her face.

"I am going to lie down, Mrs. Mitford. My head aches so that I thought perhaps you would let me have some dinner quietly here. I am so afraid of not being able to go to the ball!"

Her hostess was all sympathy, and promised to send her in some dinner, "and you must drink some champagne, my dear. Perhaps it will cure your headache, for it would never do for you to miss the ball," she said kindly.

The daintly little meal appeared in due time, but Helen ate as if each mouthful would choke her. Only the desire to play her part well enabled her to swallow anything.

The champagne, however, pulled her together, and when she made her appearance in the ball-room she looked a queen indeed.

The deep rose-pink draperies, with their filmy laces, suited her to perfection. Her glorious dark eyes rivalled in brilliancy the diamond star which shone in her hair. Her programme was over-full, but Major Wardrop's name was not there, for contrary to her usual custom Helen had kept none for him.

She appeared to be in the highest spirits; and even those who knew her best, agreed that never had they seen the stately Miss Lomax looking so brilliant.

Helen had been standing on the verandah with one of her partners, and on re-entering the room she saw Major Wardrop. He came quickly towards her, with an eagerly expectant air, and asked her for a dance. Shaking her fan gaily at him—

"Too late, Major Wardrop," she said, "my programme is full, there is no room for 'loiterers by the way,'" and with a smile and a nod she passed on with her partner, leaving Wardrop speechless with astonishment.

What had happened? Why had she kept no dances for him? It was always an understood thing between them that she should do so. Why had she departed from her usual custom?

The rest of the evening passed like a dream to him, he watched her surrounded always by an admiring coterie of men. Dancing gaily through the programme, her most favoured partner was his own friend Burrell.

Opinions were freely expressed as to her probable acceptance of his suit, and it caused but little surprise to the society of Marlahabad when Mrs. Mitford announced at the club next evening that they were engaged. Only on Wardrop did the news fall like a thunderbolt.

"I swear she loved me," he muttered to himself as he paced his verandah unable to sleep through the long hours of the night.

"If it had been any other man than Burrell—mine own familiar friend, I would try even at this late hour to put things right between us. But I can't try to spoil his life. After all she had her choice. She must have known that I loved her, so she deliberately chose between us."

And what of Helen? Was she happy? She had saved herself outward humiliation by accepting Mr. Burrell as her lover, but would she ever forget that she had given her love where it was scorned as she imagined? Ah, well, that sweet dream was over henceforward she must put Gerard, the man she had so dearly loved, out of her life. But she felt that she could not endure to stay longer with the Mitfords when she must see him almost daily. Mr. Burrell was pressing her to name an early date for their marriage so his wishes furnished her with an excuse for returning home.

As Mrs. Mitford wished her an affectionate "Good-bye," she said mysteriously, "I expect you will soon hear some news of Winnie, which will surprise you, but things are not really settled yet."

"Well, wish her joy for me, please, Mrs. Mitford, when the time comes. Ah, we are off!" And as the train moved out of the station Helen waved her hand to the group assembled to bid her farewell.

And so, in the midst of blinding tears, she left the place where she had hoped for so much happiness and where instead she had suffered such misery.

She had only seen Gerard once since her engagement was announced, and he had formally congratulated her, but beyond those few conventional words they had barely spoken to each other. And now the next time she went to Marlahabad it would be as Walter Burrell's wife.

* * * * *

One morning shortly after the Burrells had settled down in Marlahabad, Helen received a "chit" from Winnie, inviting herself to tiffin that day "for," she wrote, "I have some great news to tell you which I think will surprise you. Things were only really settled yesterday."

"I suppose I must say 'yes,' but, oh, how can I bear to hear her talk of her happiness with Gerard? How shall I ever hide my own feelings? Still, it must be done, so here goes," and Helen sat down and wrote a few lines to Winnie saying she would be pleased to see her.

In spite of her trouble Helen looked lovelier than ever in the eyes of her admirers. Sorrow had added a touch of softness which some thought she had lacked before, and there was a gentle dignity about her which was very winning.

She welcomed Winnie warmly when she arrived.

"Well," she said gaily, determined to play her part thoroughly, "and what is the great news, dear? Or can I guess it, is it that you are going to be married?"

"Yes, but what in the world made you guess so quickly?"

"My dear child, hasn't Major Wardrop been your shadow for weeks? It was easy to see what was going to happen!"

"Major Wardrop?" gasped Winnie, "Major Wardrop?" and she burst out laughing. "Why he is a regular dear and only for him I shouldn't be going to get married, but you *must* know that you are the only woman in the world he cares two straws about—Why, what is the matter, Helen, are you ill?" For Helen had turned white as her dress and for a moment could not speak.

"It is nothing, dear, nothing, I only felt a little faint, go on. Tell me who it is you are going to marry."

"Fred Darell, whom I have known all my life. The funny part of it is that Major Wardrop is his uncle and it is all through him that my people have allowed us to marry."

"Yes," murmured Helen.

"Well, you see, he hasn't much money and so father would not hear of our even being engaged, but when I told Major Wardrop all about everything, he said he would do his best to make me happy."

Alas! Helen remembered these words only too well, hey had been her undoing. But she must not give way to thought, so, with an effort, she said:

"Tell me, Winnie, how has he helped you?"

"Why, Fred had a chance of becoming a partner in the firm he worked for if he could put in a certain sum of money. This he couldn't possibly do, and that dear Major Wardrop wrote and told father that he was perfectly willing to give Fred the necessary amount if he would consent to our marriage. There was a good deal of bother one way and another, but the letters received by this last mail finally settled it all, and now I'm to go home as soon as possible and begin getting my things. Isn't it all too lovely for words?"

and in her joy Winnie hugged her friend enthusiastically. Girl-like, Winnie went on chattering of the joys which awaited her, too absorbed in her own concerns to notice how quiet Helen was, but at last even she noticed her companion's face which was pinched and drawn with pain.

"Helen, I'm sure you're ill; do let me do something for you."

"I don't feel very well—I think if I were to go and lie down quietly for an hour or two, perhaps I shall get better; you won't think me unkind?"

"Of course not, Helen, how could I? I will take myself off and leave you to rest."

Once alone, Helen's forced composure left her and she wept bitterly. "Oh, what must Gerard have thought of her—*How* could she have had so little faith in him? And how she loved him, why, why, why had she not trusted him?" and so on her thoughts went round and round till she felt giddy and dazed. There was no hope, no light anywhere. Her husband loved her dearly, on her part were respect and liking only. Both good enough things in their way, but they do not take the place of love. For hours Helen lay motionless, conscious only of the pain which overwhelmed her.

Fortunately Mr. Burrell was away for a few days, so she had time to think, before she must make the effort and pull herself together to face life with the added sorrow, caused by the knowledge that Gerard must think badly of her. That he must think her the thing she most despised, a flirt.

Ah, God, it was more than she could bear. To have her happiness within her grasp and to have let it go.

* * * * *

But time, the great healer, softened Helen's sorrow, and as the years went by she grew contented, and almost happy.

So it was with sincere grief that she mourned her husband's death, when it took place, suddenly from cholera.

She felt very lonely, for she had no children, and both her sisters were lately married.

For nearly two years she travelled all over the world, but in time she tired of wandering and made up her mind to return to England, and, taking a house, try to settle down. But first she was to pay a long visit to Winnie Maitland, long since Mrs. Darell. Her husband had prospered in the business to which his uncle had helped him and they were living in a charming house in Berkshire.

"Why, Helen, my dearest, you look younger than you did seven years ago," exclaimed Winnie, as she greeted her friend affectionately. "What have you done to yourself?"

"I have wandered about the world feeling a very lonely woman, if that is a good thing to restore youth," replied Helen laughing.

But in truth the years had left her beauty untouched, and the sad droop of the mouth and a far away expression in her eyes, had not made her less lovely in the eyes of those who cared most for her.

"You will have a very quiet visit, Helen, for I was selfish and wanted you to myself. So we have no visitors excepting Gerard (for he won't let me call him uncle), who is here on ten days' leave.

Helen felt as if her heart had stopped beating.

"Gerard," she said, "Gerard Wardrop?"

"Yes; you recollect him, don't you?"

"Very well indeed—Winnie"—laying her hand on the other's arm—"does he know that I am coming?"

"Yes; of course." Then as their eyes met a light dawned on Winnie.

"Why, Helen, is that what it is? Is that why he has never married?" For once in her life, Helen broke through her reserve, and told Winnie the story of those old days, when her want of faith had parted her from the only man she had ever cared for.

* * * * *

A few weeks later, a quiet wedding took place in London, Gerard having overruled all Helen's objections to the shortness of their engagement.

For he declared he would wait no longer for the happiness so long delayed.

Giles Wheatley.

Have you a Gramophone? No?

Then here is your opportunity to win one!

We are offering this week ten more of our now famous Gramophones for competition among *Short Stories* readers. All you have to do is to go in and win, and when the prize is delivered at your door, call in your friends and, having placed in position one of the two records with which every instrument is provided, explain to them that you gained the wonderful talking, singing, and playing instrument they are listening to by the fact of your being a reader of *Short Stories*, adding that they might go and do likewise.

There is really no limit to the attractions of our Gramophones. On a cold, wintry evening you can sit in your armchair by a cosy, warm fire, and listen to the voices of our best singers and to the performances of our finest orchestras to your heart's content.

The competition for these entertaining instruments consists in constructing a sentence from the words contained in the titles of the stories appearing in this number. No sub-titles must be used, and, of course, no word which does not appear in the titles.

The ten competitors who send in sentences which in the Editor's opinion are the best, will each be rewarded with a handsome Gramophone.

Attempts must be made on the backs of postcards only, marked "Title," and addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Postcards must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday, November 18th.

Result of the First "Serial Story" Competition.

In the above competition Gramophones have been awarded to the following successful competitors:

LONDON—

Mrs. Carpenter, 4 Greencroft Gardens, South Hampstead.

Mrs. R. Slater, 7 Seagers Cottages, Lawn Terrace, Blackheath.

UNDER 100 MILES FROM LONDON—

T. E. M. Neale, 65 Sparkenhoe Street, Leicester.

C. Biggleston, 10 William Street, Herne Bay.

OVER 100 MILES FROM LONDON—

Miss F. Rayner, Girton, Sea Road, Boscombe, Hants.

S. W. Lang, 6 Mendip View, Causeway, Fishponds, Bristol.

SCOTLAND—

R. Ure, 6 Dunedin Terrace, Clydebank, Glasgow.

A. Low, 41 Dishland Street, Arbroath.

IRELAND—

Miss Annie Brangan, 4 St. Joseph's Place, Dublin.

D. E. Jones, 69 Beechfield Street, Belfast.

The correct sentence was:—"'Who drove him?' asked Ilden, nervously kicking his heel." Page 454, col. 2, line 56.

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Ambition's Defeat.

The Story of a Frustrated Scheme.

THE London season was well advanced; in fact, it was the week before Ascot, yet Harry Wainwright had only been in town a few hours when he strolled into his club for dinner. He took his letters from the hall porter with the air of a man to whom all correspondence is a bore, and rapidly glanced through them, till he came to one the contents of which caused him the utmost astonishment.

It ran as follows:

MY DEAR HARRY.—*It may surprise you to learn from me that I intend shortly to be again married. As this will make a considerable alteration in my mode of living, I wish to see you as soon as possible. My breakfast hour is half-past ten, as usual. Your affectionate father,*

CHARLES WAINWRIGHT.

Such was Sir Charles Wainwright's brief announcement of his engagement to his only son. The only son's answer was equally brief:

MY DEAR FATHER.—*I have only come up to town this afternoon, when I found your letter waiting for me. I will call upon you to-morrow morning at half-past ten.—Your affectionate son,*

HARRY WAINWRIGHT.

From these two letters it will appear that the relations between father and son were not of a confidential nature. It would be impossible to imagine two more different characters.

Lady Wainwright had died when Harry was hardly more than a child, and since her death, Sir Charles had led an ordinary lazy bachelor's life. Both the house and the shooting on his country estate at Winterford had been let, and Sir Charles spent most of his time at his bijou residence in Mayfair. A few country house parties were quite sufficient to satisfy his taste for field sports, which had never been very ardent. At the present time he had the reputation of being the best-dressed, the most gentlemanly, and the most selfish man in London clubland.

To such a man a son must be an incubus in any case; but when the son is a keen sportsman, and possesses an utter disregard for all the conventionalities of life, the incubus becomes too great to bear. Fortunately for Harry Wainwright he had an income of five hundred a year under his mother's marriage settlement, and his father gave him another two hundred and fifty on the tacit understanding that he did not annoy him. So far the arrangement had proved satisfactory to both parties.

* * * * *

"Well, Wainwright, come to town at last? You don't seem very pleased with it, either."

The speaker was Lord Pelham, eldest son of the Duke of Harness. He was one of Harry Wainwright's greatest friends. They had been at Oxford together, and since then had ridden the same horses, shot the same coverts, and carried on harmless flirtations with the same woman—important factors in concentrating modern friendship.

"Yes, it was a nuisance to have to leave the salmon this weather, but I had to come up to town on business. Seen or heard anything of the governor, Pelham?"

"Do you mean Sir Charles?"

"Yes."

"Not much; except that they say he has been paying a lot of attention to a new beauty."

"Well, he has got engaged to somebody. Read that. The worst of it is that I came up to town to tell him that I am engaged, so I expect there will be a muddle."

"H'm! But tell me about yourself, old man. In the first place, I congratulate you, and in the next, let us order dinner."

Harry Wainwright's story was soon told. He had been staying in a country house in the north for the salmon fishing, and had fallen in love with, proposed to, and been accepted by the daughter of his host, a girl named Maud Blossom. Pelham knew her intimately, having often stayed in the house, and again warmly congratulated his friend.

"Now tell me something about my future step-mother."

"Well, to speak the truth, I don't know very much about her; she is an American widow, with lots of cash, named Mrs. Stanley. As I have already said, she is sufficiently handsome to have become a fashionable beauty. Of course, she must be clever, or Society would not have taken her on credit, so to speak, for nobody seems to know anything of her antecedents. But you will soon be able to judge for yourself. By-the-bye, are not the Blossoms coming up to town?"

"Yes; they are coming up at the end of the week for Ascot, and have got rooms at the Langham."

Even "the pink wine of France" failed to dispel the gloom which the news of his father's engagement had cast on Harry Wainwright's mind. He knew that vanity and selfishness were the two chief traits of Sir Charles' character. It was a hard confession for a son to have to make to himself, but it was the truth, and Harry Wainwright, now that he was engaged to be married, knew that he should have to look the truth sternly in the face.

He left the club soon after dinner, and went back to his hotel. What a difference twenty-four hours can make in a man's life! On the previous night Wainwright had retired to rest with the prospect of enjoying every happiness that love can bring. To-night he had already begun to realise that the path of that love would not be strewn with roses.

He was at his father's house in Mayfair punctually at half-past ten on the following morning, with a spirit which, though depressed, was resolute. If the father should sneer at the son's engagement, it was more than probable that the son should forget his filial duty and sneer at the father's.

There was no cordiality in Sir Charles' greeting. He received his son with the same polished politeness with which he would have received an utter stranger, and during breakfast neither made the slightest allusion to the subjects which filled each other's thoughts. Yet, although they talked on the ordinary topics of the day, a careful listener would have noticed that they resembled two boxers, each of whom was waiting for an opening.

Breakfast being finished, Sir Charles lit a cigarette, pushed his case towards his son, and, sinking into an armchair, said, in an indolent tone of voice:

"You gathered from my note, Harry, I suppose, that I intend to marry again? Of course, my marriage will alter considerably my present mode of living. I shall make Winterford my chief residence, where, my boy, you will always be welcome. Indeed, both Mrs. Stanley—that is my future wife—and myself would be glad if you lived there altogether."

Sir Charles had an idea of making his son his estate agent, with instructions to superintend the stables and the shooting.

"I am sorry, sir, but I am afraid the arrangement would

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be impossible. I really came up to town yesterday to tell you that I had become engaged to be married myself."

Sir Charles was silent with surprise for some seconds. Only those who knew him intimately could have recognised how angry the news had made him.

"H'm!" he answered pettishly. "Then I am afraid that the plans I had made for your happiness are destroyed. As a married man, I could not afford to give you the liberal allowance which I have been giving, while the prospect of a married step-son and his wife in the house would hardly be pleasing to my wife."

"Nor to mine, sir, for that matter."

"And may I ask who is this lady you intend to make your wife?"

"Miss Blossom. I believe you were at school with her father."

The indirect allusion to the baronet's age added fuel to the fire of his irritation, but he only said:

"Ah, John Blossom. A very dense boy. I remember him at Eton."

"And may I ask who my future step-mother may be?"

"Certainly; Mrs. Stanley. I dare say you may have heard of her."

"I must plead ignorance to the name."

Sir Charles stood aghast. The name of Mrs. Stanley as a fashionable beauty had been on everybody's lips during the present season, yet his own son had not even heard of it.

"Mrs. Stanley's attractions are well known in Society circles," he said stiffly, with a strong emphasis on the word Society. "I am generally considered a fortunate man for having won her affections."

"Indeed. Then I congratulate you. Who was the late lamented Mr. Stanley?"

The veins on Sir Charles' forehead were swollen with passion, but he replied calmly:

"I cannot see that it matters in the least to you or to anybody else who he was. I asked you here this morning to tell you of my engagement and to accept your congratulations. You have thought fit to show your annoyance at my engagement, both by words and your manner. There is only one thing now that I have to ask you and that is to keep your annoyance to yourself. It is the worst possible form to let family quarrels become public property. In regard to the private allowance which I have hitherto given you, that will have to cease entirely. You have an independent income of your own, and if you choose to marry with that income, it is your affair, not mine. I only know that I would not risk matrimony on the same terms."

"Is not that a question for Miss Blossom to decide?"

Sir Charles shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps so. At all events, it is not for me to decide. Now, in order to prevent any vulgar gossip, I wish you would call upon Mrs. Stanley. I, on my part, will call upon Miss Blossom. It is a matter of mere formal politeness; that is all."

"Certainly, sir; there is no need to tell the outside world if we disagree."

"When will you call?" Sir Charles asked abruptly.

"The sooner the better. This afternoon, if you like."

"Very well. If you will call here about three o'clock, we will go together. Is Miss Blossom in town?"

"No, sir; but she is coming up on Monday for Ascot."

"Very good. Then I shall see you at three."

Such was the meeting between father and son; no affection, no sentiment, no anger had been expressed. Both were glad the interview had been got over without a scene. The son had lost a third of his income; the father had lost a good estate agent. Both knew that the gulf that separated them had been widened.

* * * * *

Mrs. Stanley was certainly the beauty of the London season. She had shot forth like a rocket over the firmament of Society, but from what star she had emanated, and what was the propelling power of the emanation, were secrets which Society had not succeeded in unravelling.

Society did know that she had made her *début* under the wing of Lady Highclass; that she had a charming house in Grosvenor Place; that she went everywhere, and that everybody worth knowing went to her "At Homes." That was sufficient for Society; it was not sufficient for Lady Highclass.

At the time of the interview between Sir Charles Wainwright and his son, another interview was taking place between Lady Highclass and Mrs. Stanley, in the latter's boudoir. There was one point of resemblance in the two interviews; both were equally unpleasant.

"You remember the compact perfectly well. You were to give me five thousand pounds if you got married."

"Exactly, Lady Highclass, but, then, I am not married."

"As good as married, anyway. I am pressed for money, and am leaving town directly after Ascot. It can make no difference to you whether you pay me now or in a month's time, and it makes every difference to me."

"But it does make a very considerable difference to me. I have my expenses as well as you have. You have already been paid more than sufficient for your services."

"Take care, Clare Stanley. I am not a woman to be insulted with impunity. If I have hitherto exercised my social influence on your behalf, I can also exercise it against you."

"And let Society know that your influence is to be bought by the highest bidder. The British aristocracy will be proud of you."

"Perhaps. One thing is certain; that Society will believe me and won't believe you."

"Might not Society wonder how you, with your income, manage to live at such an expensive rate? No, Lady Highclass, the part of the bully does not suit you. You know perfectly well who would be the sufferer if we were to quarrel."

"I don't want to quarrel," her ladyship retorted. "But I want money, and must have it."

"But suppose that I have not got it to give you!"

Lady Highclass looked astounded.

"It is the truth, I have not five thousand pounds in the bank at the present time. I will give you a cheque for a thousand, and you must wait for the rest till it is due."

Lady Highclass protested. Then she changed her tone to one of intreaty. But in vain. Mrs. Stanley was inflexible, so, as there was nothing more to be got, her ladyship took the cheque for a thousand pounds and left.

Mrs. Stanley leant back in her chair, and a smile of contempt came over her beautiful face.

"Yes, my lady," she muttered to herself; "if I had given you five thousand pounds you would have blackmailed me for more before my marriage. Bah! How I wish the whole farce were over."

Possessing a physical beauty which was as near perfection as possible, and a fascination of manner which was well-nigh irresistible, it was not surprising that, once launched into Society, she should have sailed forth in front of all rivals.

The chief surprise about her career was that she should have accepted a baronet like Sir Charles Wainwright. He was considered two or three rungs too low in the ladder for a girl who had a royal prince dancing attendance on her.

Some few of the old loungers about clubland said that Mrs. Stanley was too clever not to know her own business best, and then Wainwright might not be quite such a lucky dog as people thought.

TURN AT ONCE to first page and read "How I Chaperoned Belinda."

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Their opinion would have been strengthened if they could have seen her as she muttered: "Bah! How I wish the whole farce were over."

Harry Wainwright called for his father at the appointed time to go with him to Grosvenor Place. He was curious to see this beautiful woman who was about to become his step-mother. He had already made up his mind that she was only marrying his father for his position and determined to watch her narrowly.

Nothing could have been more gracious than Mrs. Stanley's manner of receiving him. She affected to take a great interest in his engagement, and asked him several questions about his *fiancée*. Sir Charles listened with astonishment. As he said to her afterwards, he had never known a woman draw Harry out so much before.

"My dear Charles, as we are so closely connected, is it not better that we should be firm friends?"

"Of course, Clare! I only said to Harry this morning that there was nothing more odious than a family quarrel. Still, it will not be necessary for us to see a great deal of him and his wife."

"I wonder what she is like, and whether we shall get on together?"

"This Miss Blossom? I suppose she is the ordinary country girl of the milk-maid type. But she is not an interesting subject; let us talk about ourselves."

Although she did not say so, Harry Wainwright was a subject of great interest to Mrs. Stanley. She was resolved to make him fall in love with her, and, in spite of his engagement, had not the slightest doubt that she would succeed. In truth, so far from cementing family friendship, it seemed extremely probable that she would be the cause of a very pretty family quarrel.

* * * * *

Mr. Blossom was a model of a country squire. Nobody in their sane senses could have taken him for anything else. Even when he was sitting in his stall in the theatre he exhaled a scent of the country, which made his neighbours picture him shooting partridges amongst his own turnips. He disliked town life, and if it had not been for his wife and daughter would never have come to London. As it was, he generally spent his days at Lord's or the Oval, unless there was a race meeting within easy distance. But during his present visit he found that he had other duties to perform. He had been obliged to dine with Sir Charles Wainwright, and he had come away with a very poor opinion of his host. He had been taken to a formal dinner-party at Mrs. Stanley's, and had expressed the candid opinion afterwards that there was no fool like an old fool, which was not flattering to the baronet.

"I tell you what, Janet," he said to his wife one evening; "Harry Wainwright is as good a fellow as ever crossed a horse; but how the dickens he came to have such a father is a mystery to me." To which his wife sensibly replied that Maud was going to marry Harry and not his father.

To Maud Blossom, however, this visit was one of continuous pleasure. She was proud of having Harry Wainwright for an escort. Mrs. Stanley had been more than polite to her, and would insist on calling to take her driving in the park, on bringing her home to lunch, and on rendering those thousand and one little civilities which pave the way to friendship between women. Maud was far too innocent to detect the treason which lay hidden in the heart of her new acquaintance.

But it was Ascot week, and the Cup day had arrived, the day which Society has chosen as the meridian of the London season. Sir Charles had dressed himself with more than ordinary care for the great festival, and the result was a triumph of the tailor's art; but he was far from pleased at the arrangement which had been made for the day.

"Clare knows how I hate anything like a family party!" he said to himself, as he slung his field-glasses over his shoulder; "yet she insists on asking the Blossoms to join us. Then she is perpetually telling me to do the agreeable to Maud, while she talks to Harry. Confound it all! I wish I were married! I'll take good care that we have none of this nonsense at Winterford."

YOU CAN BEGIN "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA" TO-DAY.

The truth was that Mrs. Stanley having determined to make Harry Wainwright fall in love with her, had already commenced a flirtation with him under the guise of friendship. Both to him and to Maud she represented herself as a kind friend, anxious to prevent any family quarrel; and so she got rid of the somewhat tiresome attentions of Sir Charles, won Harry's confidence, and checked any distrust on Maud's part. She knew beforehand that her married life could not possibly be a happy one, and that it was her policy to have her stepson on her side in the future disagreements between herself and her husband, which were certain to take place.

Now, at Ascot many were the field-glasses pointed in the direction of Mrs. Stanley; many critical eyes looked at the beauty of the season. One man evidently took a special interest in her. Although he was backing horses for large amounts in Tattersall's ring, yet when his attention was not taken up with racing, he was always looking at Mrs. Stanley with a puzzled expression on his face. That he was a well-known man in betting circles was apparent from the deference shown to him by the bookmakers, not a few of whom wondered at his present absent-minded manner. At last this leviathan among backers beckoned to a quietly-dressed man, and talked earnestly to him for some two minutes. The quietly-dressed man listened, occasionally nodded his head, but never spoke a word until his companion had finished, when he merely said:

"All right."

"Then I shall see you to-morrow at seven?" inquired the backer.

"Yes," replied the quietly-dressed gentleman; and they parted as mysteriously as they had met.

Meanwhile, Sir Charles Wainwright, as he had predicted, was spending a very unhappy day. Both Mr. and Mrs. Blossom took an unaffected interest in horseflesh, and made constant excursions to the paddock, leaving the rest of the party to amuse themselves.

Now a crowd of friends and acquaintances were always hovering round Mrs. Stanley, and as that lady also took care to keep Harry Wainwright at her side, Sir Charles was obliged to attend to Maud and to suffer the pangs of jealousy at the same time. Maud Blossom belonged to the class of unsophisticated country girls for whom Sir Charles had no admiration; so when he had laid two "ponies" to one on the favourite for the Cup, and seen it beaten by a short head, what little good temper he did possess had taken wings and flown away from him.

"Harry," he said petulantly to his son: "I am afraid I must ask you to take care of Maud for a few minutes, as I have to go into the ring."

It must be remembered that Sir Charles' love for Clare Stanley partook more of the nature of pride than of affection. If she had not been the centre of admiration he would never have given her a moment's thought. But as some men are ambitious to ride the most showy horse in the Row, so others are ambitious to be engaged to the most beautiful woman of the season. Such was the case with Sir Charles; so it was extremely galling to him that Clare should give him the cold shoulder at such a place as Ascot. He thought that Society would notice it, and so it did.

"I say, Mrs. Stanley doesn't seem to be very spoony on her elderly beau, does she? Who is the young fellow with her?"

"Oh, that's young Wainwright, her future stepson."

The first speaker whistled in surprise.

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"He's all right. He is one of those sporting fellows who would like to spend their lives shooting big game in the Rockies. Besides, he's to be married himself."

"Is he? Then I pity the girl."

This, and much more, said Society.

But Harry Wainwright had no suspicion of the remarks which were being made about him. Mrs. Stanley had told him that she wished to lessen the breach between him and his father! She had been very kind to Maud, to whom she had told the same tale. So if she did not deceive the scandal-loving world, she deceived this innocent pair. Partially, though not altogether, she deceived Sir Charles when they returned home.

"I don't know what I have done, Clare, but you would hardly speak a word to me to-day."

"And I thought I was doing exactly as you wished. If you want to spoon in public like John Thomas and Mary Jane——"

"Don't be absurd. You know what I mean. You would not let me come near you, and, worse still, made me look after that milkmaid."

"Now, Charles, you have lost your money and are cross. At least, you have me all to yourself now."

She kissed him as she spoke and soon coaxed him into a good temper.

"Wait till we are united, love, then we can see as little of our Phyllis and Strephon as we choose. Now, Charles, say you are not angry with me before you go."

* * * * *

Mr. Carte, of Chicago, the leviathan amongst backers on the turf, sat in his private room in a private hotel in Albemarle Street at seven o'clock on the evening following the Cup day, waiting for the quietly-dressed gentleman. It was the first year that Mr. Carte had patronised the English turf, and certain bookmakers hoped it would be his last. He had come over with plenty of dollars and a system; the system had succeeded and the dollars had increased! Socially he had confined himself entirely to racing circles, and had not even evinced any ambition to enter the precincts of clubland. This was the reason why he had not seen Mrs. Stanley before the previous day, but now that he had seen her she occupied a considerable share of his thoughts.

"Well, Dick," said Mr. Carte, as the quietly-dressed gentleman, whom we will introduce as Richard Lee, entered the room, "it has been a glorious week; another regular knock-down blow for the ring, my lad. Pleasure first and business afterwards. Come to dinner—I am as hungry as a cowboy."

Dinner is a lengthy affair amongst racing men who are obliged to be abstemious during the day, and it was after eleven before the two friends returned to Albemarle Street. An hour was spent in going through the betting-book. Then, throwing himself into an arm-chair with an air of relief, Carte said:

"And now, Dick, how about this Mrs. Stanley?"

"She is Nell Robinson, widow of John Robinson, who was shot down Texas way some two years ago."

"I more than suspected that yesterday; but how the thunder has she managed to come over here and raise Cain in Society?"

"Well, she is the 'cutest woman I ever ran across. Her beauty speaks for itself."

"I know all that. But who was Stanley? And where did she get the shekels from? I don't know much about Society, but I do know this, that American widows don't catch on unless they are considerably gilded."

"Then if you want to find out that, you will have to trace her career since Jack Robinson's death. Personally I don't suppose that Stanley ever existed, except in the lady's imagination. All I know is that she came over to England at the beginning of the year, and was run by a certain Lady High-class, who seems to be a bit of a boss. But what is the good of finding out? You don't want to spoil the woman's game, do you?"

"Certainly not; unless there was something to be gained by it."

"What can you gain? You don't want money."

(*Continued on next page.*)

LIVING SKELETONS.

An Illustration from Life.

WE are all familiar with the living skeleton, or professional lean man of the side show, whose leanness is due partly to bad nutrition, and partly to the fact that by means of purgatives he expels the food from his system before it has time to be fully absorbed.

In his case the emaciation is intentional, but there are scores of cases where it is quite the reverse, and brought about entirely by imperfect digestion and general ill-health. In such cases Charles Forde's bile beans will be found a sure and speedy remedy, as the following plain statement of fact goes to prove. The story comes from Mr. George Blanchard, of Morley Street, Kettering, and was told by him to a "Kettering Guardian" reporter. He said:—"For seventeen years I suffered from acute indigestion, which steadily became worse till at last my doctor gave me up as incurable, and I came to be looked upon as dying. I had violent pains in my sides and stomach, which latter was always distended with wind; and though I belched incessantly I found no relief, for the simple reason that the wind kept forming as fast as I could get rid of it.

"Every morsel of solid food I swallowed seemed to turn to wind, and also brought on severe fits of vomiting, which shook my whole system. I had to leave off taking solid food altogether, and subsist entirely on liquids. As a consequence I became so weak that I could hardly drag one foot after the other, while my limbs wasted away till they were no thicker than those of an infant! To add to my misery, I suffered also from dizziness and profuse sweats.

"As I have said, I had medical advice, but derived no benefit, and after a time was told by my doctor that he could do nothing more for me, and that I should never again be well. At this I abandoned hope and made up my mind for death. I was in this pitiable condition when my wife chanced to read of the marvellous cures effected by Charles Forde's bile beans, and we got a box. I began taking them, and soon realised that I had at last found the right thing. The stomach pains ceased gradually, as did also the vomiting. The flatulence and dizziness disappeared, and I began to regain strength. All this time I had been taking bile beans regularly, and continued to do so, till now I am well and strong again, and feel better than I have done for twenty years. I can strongly recommend Charles Forde's bile beans to anyone suffering as I did from indigestion, dizziness, stomach pains, vomiting, or weakness. Their effect is truly wonderful."

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"I don't know, but useful information is always worth something or other. Let me see, you went down into the Argentine for a few years or so, after the Robinson affair, so couldn't know anything about her."

Dick Lee nodded.

"Who is this Sir Charles Wainwright, whom she is going to marry? He is not one of the regular racing fraternity."

"Man about town," the other answered laconically.

"Got any shekels?"

"Yes, and a country seat called Winterford."

"Fancy Nell Robinson as a baronet's wife and the mistress of an old English country house! By Jove, I've hit it! Sir Charles shall go on the turf, and I'll manage his horses."

Carte was so pleased at the idea, that he did not notice the look on Dick Lee's face. If he had, his joy would not have been so boisterous as it was. He talked exultingly for some minutes as he fancied himself an owner of racehorses. He might have fancied himself a member of the Jockey Club if Lee had not suddenly interrupted him.

"You seem to ignore the consent of Sir Charles."

"Bother Sir Charles! He would consent, to prevent the exposure of his wife. Or I might approach the wife first, and she would coax him into consenting, to save herself."

"Both contingencies are extremely improbable."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that you have nothing to expose. Listen to the case. You happen to know that Lady Wainwright is the widow of an American gambler, and you disclose the fact to her husband, who is probably aware of it already, demanding as a price of your secrecy that you should enter into a racing partnership with you. He would either laugh at you, or have you horse-whipped. So much for the first contingency! The second is worse. The lady would defy you to do your worst, and ring the bell for you to be shown out of the house."

"Then I would let Society know what sort of woman it has made its idol."

"Society would not believe you, in the first place, and you would gain nothing by it, in the second. You might have some influence if you chose to make a complaint to the Jockey Club, but you are powerless to make a complaint against a reigning beauty."

"But how did she get her money? The woman must have some secret."

"Probably she has," replied Dick Lee curtly. "But then you don't happen to know it."

"I must say you don't seem very keen on the matter."

"Because I don't see anything to be got out of it. Sorry to destroy that charming castle you were building in the air, but there is not the slightest chance of its ever having an earthly foundation. Take my advice, and think no more about it. I must be off to bed now; meet you at breakfast. Good-night."

But Dick Lee did not go to bed. He sat up smoking and thinking till the first streaks of dawn lit up his room. In the stillness of the night many plans suggested themselves to his mind, only to be tossed aside as worthless as soon as they were formed. On one point only was he satisfied, namely, that he had put Carte off the scent of Mrs. Stanley's history. He alone of all men in London knew that history, but he was doubtful how to make use of his knowledge, or, indeed, whether to make use of it at all.

"If I were sure she would be happy, her secret should die with me," he said to himself more than once. Strange thought for the hero of over fifty duels. If it had been expressed aloud, nobody who knew the man would have believed in its sincerity. Could this be the same Dick Lee who had beaten the Red Indian in cunning; who was the deadest shot in the Southern States; who had never been known to spare either man or woman? But he had never shown to any living creature the one deep wound in his heart. Until that day he thought himself that it was cured, but now it was bleeding as copiously as ever. The love which he had deemed dead was again full of life; but how different was the nature of that life! What had been passion was now compassion; jealousy had become generosity; the burning ardour of the man was changed into the tenderness of a child.

* * * * *

Mr. and Mrs. Blossom, having enjoyed their annual visit to London in their own peculiar fashion, left town, and also left their daughter behind them. Maud was now the guest of Mrs. Stanley, much to the disgust of Sir Charles, who, with the selfishness of all lovers, whether they be twenty-one or eighty-one, wanted to monopolise the society of his *fiancée*. Mrs. Stanley, however, thinking that she should have as much of Sir Charles' society after marriage as she wanted, had elevated Harry Wainwright to the position of her "tame cat."

It was a proof of the woman's cleverness that she had done this without exciting the jealousy of Maud. London life, with its dissipations—its Hurlingham, its Sandown, its dances in Mayfair, and its "At Homes," in Belgravia—were such novelties to the country girl, that her mind was in a constant state of bewilderment, and she never paused to consider that her lover's attentions were becom ng daily less ardent. Even if she had had any doubts about Harry Wainwright, Mrs. Stanley would have instantly dispelled them during those curlpaper confidences which women love to indulge in.

"My dear Maud, Harry's devotion is really too tiresome. He sat out two waltzes with me to-night, while you were dancing with Lord Pelham, and his conversation consisted of Maud, Maud, Maud, nothing but Maud."

Then the girl's eyes would brighten. She had thought at the time that Harry might have been more attentive to her, now she blamed herself for thinking him wanting in devotion. Certainly Mrs. Stanley ought to have been satisfied at the success of her deception.

She knew that she was on the verge of a precipice and that at any moment she might be hurled into the chasm of shame beneath. But this she had known when she had started on her adventurous career, and this was the reason why she wished to hasten her marriage with Sir Charles, and to make Harry Wainwright her lover, so that he might protect her in her future troubles. Her social success had been greater than she had ever anticipated. But she had sacrificed her love at the altar of her ambition, and had found out in the quiet moments of her solitude that the artificial veneer had not stifled the woman's heart with which Nature had endowed her.

She was sitting one July afternoon in her boudoir thinking of her old life, and feeling some little remorse that she had ever forsaken it. It was not the life in Texas that she was dreaming of, but of the two years which succeeded it—two years spent with the husband whom she loved, amongst the most luxurious scenery of South America—two years of unbroken bliss.

Where was that husband now? Was he alive or dead?

She was alone. Maud had gone with some new friends to a *matinée*, and Sir Charles was in the City on business. Suddenly Harry Wainwright was announced.

She received him with her usual fascinating manner—a manner which was charming him on to destruction as it had charmed many before.

The man sat down beside her on the sofa, and yielded himself up to her influence. Occasionally his conscience had smitten him about Maud, and then he would drown conscience in wine. Now the voice of conscience was dumb; he drank in every word which came from her lips; he gazed upon her beauty and was intoxicated by it.

"Clare, my friendship, my love is yours," he said as he bent over her. "My darling——"

A knock at the door arrested his words, and a servant entered with a note. Mrs. Stanley looked at the handwriting and turned as pale as death.

(*Continued on page 638.*)

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KSR . KSR . KSR .

"There is a man waiting for an answer, madam."

She tore open the note and quickly read the contents. Then she went to her writing desk.

"I will be with you at the time you mention," was all she wrote, and, addressing the envelope, handed it to the servant.

"Clare, darling what has made you worried?"

She rose angrily.

"What right have you to call me darling? You, who are engaged to another woman. No, Harry," she added, more softly, "forgive me, for it has been my fault. Leave me now; forget me and all that you have said to me. It is not too late. Go to Maud. She loves you and believes in you. Your place is by her side. This infatuation for me will be past in a day, and your love for Maud will be stronger. Go now, I wish to be alone."

He went out without a word. The dream was over. The veil was lifted from his eyes.

And the note which had caused this sudden change in Clare Stanley? It simply ran:

Meet me in the Broad Walk at Kensington at six.—

DICK.

It was already five o'clock. There was no time to be lost. She hastily changed her elaborate tea-gown for a plain serge dress, and was soon being whirled down to Kensington. She had had no minutes even for thought. Her brain was too dizzy to enable her to judge how to act.

She trembled as she walked up the Broad Walk, glancing nervously about her. At last a quietly-dressed gentleman stepped out from behind one of the huge trees.

"Nell!"

"Dick!"

Dick Lee held out his hand and she took it, though her eyes were downcast. They walked along a few yards in silence.

"Nell," the man began, and there was a note of the saddest compassion in his voice; "I am not here to reproach you, nor to molest you in any way. I only want you to answer me one question. Are you happy?"

"I am the most miserable woman on earth," she replied sobbing.

They strolled away from the madding crowd, though few would have recognised them as the Society beauty and callous gambler.

"Can you ever forgive me?" she murmured.

"I can and do forgive you. I forgive you so much that if you ask me to leave you now, your secret shall never pass my lips. If you wish me to remain, Nell, it is not too late now to return to the old days of happiness."

"How can I thank you for your generosity? How can I atone to you for the past? I was and am your wife. I will be your slave."

And thus she sacrificed her ambition at the altar of her love and duty.

In the course of the evening Sir Charles Wainwright received the following note, together with presents which he had made Mrs. Stanley:

DEAR SIR CHARLES.—*Circumstances have occurred which render it imperative on my part to break off our engagement. I am sorry for any pain that this letter may cause you, but you would have suffered more if I had married you. Do not try to see me, as henceforth I am dead to Society. Wishing you happiness in the future, I am, yours sincerely,*

CLARE STANLEY.

* * * * *

On board an Atlantic liner two people, whom the passengers have agreed to be a newly-married couple, are sitting side by side. Love is visible in the face of both; but in the face of the man it arises from the sense of protection, in the face of the woman from heartfelt gratitude.

L. Payne.

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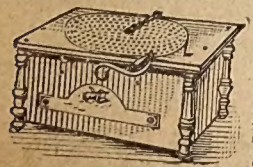

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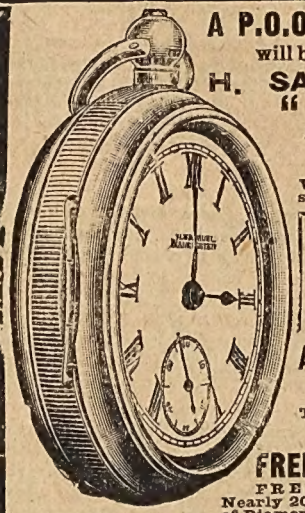

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

The Absent Mother.

"ETIQUETTE" has known a certain girl for two years, but is not engaged. He, however, is in the habit of constantly visiting her at the lodgings in which she lives with her mother, who is a widow, and a trained nurse, and therefore constantly away from home. What "ETIQUETTE" wants to know is, "Is it right for him to call on the girl and sit with her for hours during her mother's absence, and not in the presence of third parties?" People have, apparently, been saying things, after the manner of "people."

* * * * *

It would save embarrassment to the girl, if "ETIQUETTE" became engaged to her. Living in apartments, obviously people would be inclined to make remarks at such visits in the absence of proper chaperonage. There is no alternative for "ETIQUETTE" save to announce their engagement, or else to discontinue his visits when the mother is absent if he wants to avoid gossip.

'Twixt Two Girls.

"WILFRED" is about to propose to Lily. But he has learnt from an indirect source that Isabel, a friend of his family, has conceived a deep affection for him. Lily, however, whom he deeply loves, does not care for him much.

* * * *

I suppose "WILFRED" will not propose to Lily unless he has some kind of token of her returning his affections. At any rate, he should certainly get some sort of confirmation before doing so. Perhaps it would be well for him to ask her outright if she thinks she could return his love. A definite negative would, though, perhaps, mortifying to "WILFRED," at any rate leave him in no doubt. As to Isabel, if he has no feeling towards her, he had better avoid all meeting rather than provoke an impossible fancy on her part.

A Case for Faith.

"PETAL" is engaged to a man, and they are to be married in twelve months' time. But he seems to have turned cold to her lately. People tell her that he has been paying attention to a pretty girl friend of "PETAL'S," but the latter does not want to mention the matter to her as they have always been very great friends. In spite of this, Ralph (the sweetheart) persists in saying his love for "PETAL" is unchanged, and that he hopes to marry her "some day."

* * * *

Don't believe what your friends say, "PETAL." Ralph may be simply momentarily attracted to the girl friend, and, perhaps, has simply been polite to her. She is, you say, very pretty, and even engaged men cannot resist being attentive under such circumstances. As the girl is a great friend of yours, I am sure she would not attempt to steal the affection of your sweetheart. In fact, she is much more likely, if she is a real friend, to resist any overtures on his part. You might take the opportunity to hint to her that it would be a terrible blow to you if you thought anybody was drawing him away from you. Why not ask her advice on the matter, and thereby find out her own feelings? In any case if he still protests his affection, believe him before others, who are probably speaking only from hearsay, and perhaps a little bit of mischief.

Grievance of a Go-between.

"MAUDIE'S" brother has taken a fancy to a girl friend of hers, but they have been quarrelling a good deal. When the girl quarrels with him she goes to "MAUDIE," but when they make it up, she seems not to want her company. What would I advise?

* * * *

Is it not always the fate of neutral parties that when the enemies are agreed, they find themselves left out in the cold? You had better refuse to sympathise with the girl when she quarrels with your brother. Naturally, you cannot know who is right and who is wrong, and should not take either side. Tell her next time that she must fight out her troubles with your brother on her own account. If you can pave the way to making it up, do so, but don't take either side if you wish to remain friends with either when they are reconciled.

A Changeable Lover.

WHAT is a man to do when he breaks off an engagement with one girl, to make one with another, and then discovers that it is the first girl after all that he really loves? Such is the plight in which "PERPLEXED" (South Africa) finds himself. For three years he had been attached to Sylvia, but on his travels he met Dorothy, with whom he fell in love, and started correspondence with her. Finally, he found that he was fonder of Dorothy, and got his release from Sylvia. He has since discovered that it is Sylvia after all that he really loves, but Dorothy still believes in his sincerity towards her, while he has already promised her marriage.

* * * *

Now "PERPLEXED" is evidently in two minds as to which girl he really loves. He has had a spell of Sylvia and evidently wearied of her, and, after taking turn with Dorothy, finds a similar result. I think myself that it is probable he does not really love either girl, or he would never have been drawn away from both in turn in this fashion. Now, if "PERPLEXED" finds that he no longer loves Dorothy, and that, apart altogether from any entanglement with Sylvia, he could not really be happy with her, it is right that he should make the matter known to her, but in as discreet a way as possible. He should make the severance gradual, and as he is a commercial traveller it should be possible for him to see her less frequently. Let him free himself of Dorothy, clearly and completely, and then start the position anew with Sylvia. I am not giving this advice in any sympathy with "PERPLEXED," as his conduct, which he himself admits, is not to be admired. But if his love towards his present *fiancée* has ceased, the engagement should not proceed if it can be broken off in a way which would not greatly injure either party. How to do that must depend on "PERPLEXED'S" tact.

Another Indictment.

THANKS, "E. W." (Paisley) for your remarks. However, I have nothing to add to my reply to the correspondent mentioned under the heading "Advice Misinterpreted." I am sorry you should have gained the impression that I am partial to women in my advice. But you will agree that it is not fair to select one paragraph from an article in support of this. If, in the instance you cite, I have selected the case of a "stupid man," in the same article, a little higher up, a similar reference was made to a "stupid woman." And this rule I have always tried to observe. If, on one occasion, I find myself compelled to sympathise with a woman in a trouble; on another, as you will see by glancing at any of my columns, I at once find myself in agreement with a man. That correspondents generally do not think me prejudiced where men are concerned is shown by my letters, three-quarters of which are from men.

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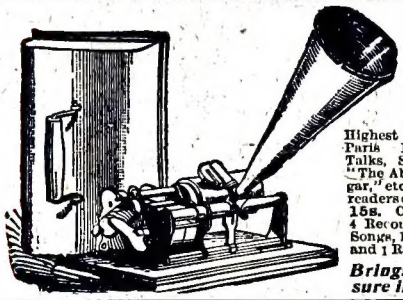

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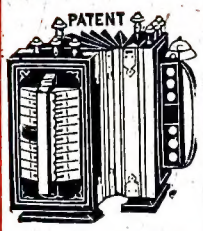

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